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Travels In Modernity:  
Spectatorship and Narratives  
In British Film Culture

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in  
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Michael Wayne

School of Art, Design and Performing Arts

Middlesex University

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**PAGE**

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## Orientations

The seeds of this study were sown from a quite personal and familial background. Interested in video and oral history, I interviewed my father's brother, uncle Wolf, seeking to record both his life as a boy in the depression hit 1930s, his contribution to fighting fascism in North Africa and Italy during the Second World War and also, to find out about his parents and my grandparents and how, as Jews from Poland, they arrived in Britain from very different class backgrounds and met. My grandparents were two different kinds of migrants. My grandfather was an immigrant (he would today be called an economic migrant) from a poor background of little opportunity within the Jewish ghettos of an anti-Semitic Poland that was still part of the Tsar's Russian Empire. There were however some bourgeois Jews even within Poland, and my grandmother came from such a family. Her father owned a company which produced agricultural machinery. One year, the whole family went on holiday to the Baltic. The family holiday, then a recently developed mid-nineteenth century mode of travel for Europeans, is supposed to be a temporary absence from home. But it quickly turned into another kind of travel altogether. Their timing was not fortuitous. The year was 1914. The First World War broke out and overnight, my grandmother's family became refugees. She and other members of the family arrived in London having traversed a physical journey across Europe and a journey from one social class to another.

These travels which had brought my grandparents to Britain had left their trace in the identity of uncle Wolf. Born in Hackney, his friends would ask him where he was from. This condition, being both of a place but also other to it, provides the conceptual thread linking the selection of what, on the face of it, may appear to be an eclectic collection of films. This cultural dynamic (being both placed and displaced simultaneously) may also serve as a model for thinking about the politics of social location. We all occupy social locations which are the horizon of our material lives, but subjects can be both *of* a social location while also being other to it politically. In the case of my uncle Wolf, his cultural duality had some bearing, I think, on his political trajectory into the Communist Party. His experiences of the economic slump in the 1930s and the fight against Fascism in the Second

World War, were mediated through a particular place, Britain, but at some level, a certain dis-identification culturally, intertwines with a political /intellectual journey/identification back to an Eastern Europe so recently transformed by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia.

These themes of travel, diaspora, national identity and hybridity have become closely associated with postmodern approaches to the study of culture and meaning. Travel, the nomadic subject, the crossing of borders and the transformation of meanings which that produces, constitutes the ur-motif of postmodern theory. And yet I knew that I would not be travelling in that theoretical direction and that I wanted, in broad terms, to keep faith with the political trajectory which my uncle took in the 1930s and 1940s. For the moment though, the exact theoretical/conceptual and political compass eluded me.

I turned instead to the way British cinema has traditionally been studied. Having identified some films which involved characters travelling across national borders, I began to wonder why the study of British cinema involved methodologies so dedicated to preserving it's subject as a self contained, insular entity, locked into a national space conceived as so impervious to outside influences. How persuasive was this approach in an era increasingly self conscious of global interconnections and, more specifically, that pan-national project which has been growing on the European mainland since the mid-1980s? Dissatisfied with the limitations of an approach to the national which takes it's autonomy and integrity for granted, I expanded the ambition of my project. Now, films involving narrative travels across national borders were to become illustrative of a methodology which situated British film culture in a set of international flows and dynamics. I now conceived British cinema within a triangulation of geo-cultural influences: America, Europe and the post-Imperial legacy.

The term geo-cultural should be understood as having a paradoxical meaning. On the one hand, it refers to the way culture is grounded in place; this is where meanings and values are forged and the dominant borders of any geographical place has been, within modernity, the nation-state. But while culture has a relationship with geography, it is not fixed to place. The media as well as the movement of people have meant that culture can

uncouple itself from place, from the geographical delimitations of the nation-state, and moving through space re-locate itself in new places, transforming both itself and the cultural patterns already established in the place it has just arrived in. At this point then, I began to think of travel not only in terms of narratives but also in terms of spectatorship. What imaginary travels do cultural resources provide, particularly when those cultural resources derive in whole or part from "outside" (even though consumption also clearly makes them "inside") the geo-cultural domain of the national identity? What travels in meaning, what semantic borders are being opening up by the foreign, the exotic, the different?

This thesis is about cinema and it is about British cinema, but it does not read like a conventional work of film studies. It does not stop at the borders of the film text anymore than it made sense to stop at the borders of the national in order to understand the national. It does not stop at the usual disciplinary borders of film studies either. Although this thesis ultimately grounds itself in readings of the film text, the conventional object of study, the reader will go on many excursions in order to contextualise those readings. History, politics, philosophy, the social sciences, psychoanalysis - although not the ubiquitous Lacan, more the Frankfurt School - this is some of the terrain the reader covers. It is undertaken not for it's own sake, not because I love digressions, but because ultimately we need these various contextualisations to make sense of the film texts which in turn illuminate the methodology. So I ask for the reader's patience and to some extent trust that their elliptical journey will be revealing rather than disorientating.

But what lies at the core of the methodology? The fact that this thesis has ended up as a running critique of the postmodern paradigm, even though it shares many of it's themes, is due largely to me finding Walter Benjamin; or rather the version of Walter Benjamin constructed by Susan Buck-Morss in The Dialectics Of Seeing. There is no need to anticipate here how I will use Benjamin theoretically, suffice to say that my Benjamin is a historical materialist whose thinking about culture and it's complex relations to time and space, occupies the same critical relationship to post modernism as Marx and Engels' The German Ideology does to the academic idealist philosophy of the mid-C19th.

There is a more personal sense in which Benjamin is an apposite figure and not only because his major Marxist writings occurred during the 1930s when my uncle was, in his own way, attempting to make sense of the world. There is also the odd parallel between Benjamin and my grandfather. My uncle describes him as a figure dislocated from western modernity. He grew up in Poland in a Yeshiva, a religious seminary, although he was not particularly religious. He was however interested in the Torah from a secular, intellectual perspective and my uncle describes him as "something of an academic". That sense of my grandfather struggling to make sense of a very ancient language within the modern world is strikingly close to Benjamin's own secular interest in the Messianic Judaism of the Kabbalah. And this interest in a very old text is combined with an image of my grandfather from my uncle, whereby he would always be reading the newspapers. But, he would never quite finish reading the daily edition and so they would pile up on his chair as he desperately tried to catch up with the flow of modernity recorded by the print media. He never quite did. Although he willingly joined the masses migrating to the west in a distinctly modern journey, he never really recovered or found a vocation at his journey's end, remaining largely out of step with the world he had chosen to join. That lack of fit derives ultimately from the fact that within the global space of capitalism, geo-cultural terrains occupy different time zones. Like Trotsky, Benjamin knew that this combined and uneven development, this lack of fit - to be explored here via spectatorship and narrative travels - was an important source of hope and change.

# **Introduction**

It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers - a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity - which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis - the same from the standpoint of its main conditions - due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc., from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances. - Karl Marx.<sup>1</sup>

This study explores the meaning of Britishness as it has been defined by its relations with other geo-cultural terrains. If on the one hand Britishness, as we shall discover, has powerfully insular and inward looking elements, it has on the other hand an identity forged within a triangulation of significant Others. Britain's 'special' relationship with America, its political and cultural position on the edge of mainland Europe and the legacy of its Imperial past mark the three points of that triangle in which I want to locate the formations of national identity. This triangulation is complex. There is a sense in which each relationship Britain has with one geo-cultural formation, e.g. America, is also imbricated with or superimposed onto Britain's relationships with the other two. This imbricated spatial model must also factor in how each of these relations are themselves prone to ambivalence, marked as they are by both fascination and fear with these various Others.

This triangulation calls into question notions of national identity and belonging which presuppose a more hermetically sealed, endogenously produced national identity. The model I am developing is more porous, to use a phrase from Benjamin.<sup>2</sup> This spatial dimension to the forging of Britishness depends upon and interacts with a temporal dynamic best described as a tension between modernity and tradition. As we shall see, British cinema's famed traditionalism and obsession with the past is more complex than a simple rejection of modernity. Modernity and tradition are not to be thought of as a stark binary, but as having a dialectical relationship: they are two poles of the same process, inextricably linked,

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole Vol.3, New York International, 1967, pp.791-792.

<sup>2</sup> W. Benjamin, "Naples" in One Way Street New Left Books, London, 1979, pp.169-170.

inextricably conflictual. This tension is universal to capitalism, with each nation-state and identity constituting itself as a particular negotiation, across the registers of class, gender, ethnicity and other social demarcations, of tensions which mark the capitalist mode of temporality everywhere.

Globalisation and in particular, the developing integration of the European Union, are attuning film criticism to the international markets and cultures in which any national cinema operates.<sup>3</sup> Registering these spatial and temporal dynamics requires developing a critical method somewhat different to the normal approaches to the subject matter in hand. British cinema tends to attract approaches which are either *historical* (that is mapping a historical chronology);<sup>4</sup> *generic*;<sup>5</sup> focused on a *studio* or production unit(s);<sup>6</sup> or *auteurist*<sup>7</sup> or any combination of the above.

What follows does not really fit into any of the methodological approaches I have identified. The closest would be the historical approach. But this study does not aspire to offer a *detailed* map of the cinematic and cultural dynamics within a given historical period in say the way John Hill does in his influential book, Sex, Class and Realism, British Cinema 1956-1963. While this study is close to Hill's work politically, I have sacrificed attention to detail for greater theoretical scope and ambition. The work which has already been done to map out the institutional and aesthetic development of British cinema is the indispensable prerequisite without which this study would be impossible, but it strikes out in a different direction and attempts to develop a new theoretical paradigm for the study of British cinema. There

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Border Crossing (eds), J.Hill, M.McLoone, P.Hainsworth, Institute of Irish Studies, Belfast, 1994; D. Morley and K.Robbins, Spaces of Identity: global media, electronic landscapes and cultural boundaries. Routledge, London, 1995. The first book covers Irish cinema, the second engages with general debates concerning local, national and global identities, but does not engage, as this study will, with analysis of film texts. L.Friedman (ed), British Cinema and Thatcherism does contain some essays which open British cinema up internationally. Elsaesser discusses the image of Britishness within the context of international image markets, while Wollen suggests that the 1980s saw in the work of Jarman and Greenaway, a belated engagement with European Modernism. Perhaps inevitably in an anthology of essays, no overall methodology concerning British film culture and its Others, emerges.

<sup>4</sup> M. Landy, British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960, Princeton University press, New Jersey, 1991.

<sup>5</sup> P. Cook, Fashioning The Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema BFI, London, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> S. Aspinall and R. Murphy, Gainsborough Melodrama, BFI, London, 1983, or C. Barr's Ealing Studios Studio Vista, London, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> A. Burton, Liberal Directions: Basil Dearden And Postwar British Film Culture Flicks Books, 1997.



is perhaps, to appropriate Julian Petley's metaphor, <sup>8</sup> a lost continent to be recovered not only in terms of subject matter, but methodological possibilities as well. Primarily, this study develops and applies a *philosophy of history*, using film texts and historical contexts to explore the method and test its usefulness generally but especially in relation to British (film) culture. In attempting to renew the claims of Marxism over contemporary cultural criticism, the philosophy of history derives from Marx and Walter Benjamin

There are of course many Walter Benjamins. Even when he was alive, Benjamin presented and developed different facets of his theoretical influences to different, even antagonistic close friends. <sup>9</sup> After his death, these ambivalences helped foster almost as many Benjamins as interpreters of him. My Benjamin comes from Susan Buck-Morss's brilliant reconstruction of Benjamin's major but unfinished project: his study of nineteenth century Paris. This study spanned and required the accumulation of a vast expanse of cultural material. Benjamin's elaborate filing system included notes and evidence on architectural developments such as Haussman's boulevards and the development of iron and glass buildings, on advertising, on Baudelaire's poetry, on Grandville's satirical cartoons, on prostitution, on street lighting, photography, political insurrection and fashion. Above all, and at the centre of his study, stood the Paris Arcades, the site where all this cultural material intersected in the name and shape of the commodity. It is the Benjamin who developed a theory of the superstructure to complement Marx's theory of the mode of production, which Susan Buck-Morss reassembles. <sup>10</sup> It is a timely intervention when cultural theory has in many ways given up on or hopelessly mangled the essential tools of a Marxist epistemology.

## **Modernity And National Identity**

A defining component of modernity is the formation and conceptualisation of the nation-state, where a centralised political authority claims sovereignty over a clearly defined territory and where the formation of a

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<sup>8</sup> J. Petley, 'The Lost Continent' in *All Our Yesterdays* (ed) c. Barr, BFI, London, 1986.

<sup>9</sup> E. Lunn, *Marxism & Modernism: an historical study of Lukacs, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno*, University of California Press, London 1982, pp.149-279.

<sup>10</sup> S. Buck-Morss, *Dialectics Of Seeing, Walter Benjamin And The Arcades Project* MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1989, pp.115-124.

national culture becomes a crucial underpinning to the national polity. As Benedict Anderson has argued, it is the cultural dimension to nation-ness - not actual structures, systems of administrations or institutions, which gives this abstract concept its capacity to arouse "deep attachments" <sup>11</sup> regardless of the real inequalities and exploitations that may characterise the nation. This has led radical historians to stress the constructed nature of national identity, although there is a danger, as Anthony Smith has suggested, that national identity is then seen as an imposition upon "mute and passive" populations. <sup>12</sup> On the other hand, Smith's own argument that national identity involves the "rediscovery of the community's 'ethno-history' " <sup>13</sup> makes too many concessions to the exclusively endogenous, romantic and reactionary components of national identity with its myths of unchanging continuity and internal ethnic purity.

The re-organisation of time and space played an important role in the formation of national consciousness and has been described by various theorists in different ways. Harvey points to the organisation of labour time around the working day, week, year, breaks and holidays. <sup>14</sup> Anderson stresses the importance of the concept of "meanwhile" in the imagined community of the nation. A highly modern notion, "meanwhile" constructs temporal coincidence across spatial distance and is central to the emerging print media of the novel and newspaper. <sup>15</sup> The concept of "meanwhile" in effect disaggregates time and space so that modern living can imagine different processes happening simultaneously in different spaces. Early cinema was to discover its own version of "meanwhile" through the development of parallel editing, while the concept of "meanwhile" becomes crucially important in constructing a sense of community within cinematic representations and travel across different spaces.

This idea of a connectedness between people across spatial distances expands the notion of community out beyond the immediate locality and

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<sup>11</sup> B. Anderson, Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism Verso, London, 1991, p.4.

<sup>12</sup> A. D. Smith, "Towards a Global Culture ?" in Theory, Culture and Society SAGE, London, vol.7 1990, p.179.

<sup>13</sup> A.D. Smith, *ibid*, p.181.

<sup>14</sup> D. Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change Blackwell, Oxford, 1990 , p.231.

<sup>15</sup> B. Anderson, *op.cit.*, p.25.

into the imagined terrain of national identity. The growth of the media becomes a crucial component of what Giddens terms temporal-spatial distancing, or the separation of time and space. This he defines as “the condition for the articulation of social relations across wide spans of time-space, up to and including global systems.”<sup>16</sup> Thus the very processes which make the configuration of a national space possible, also transcend it, setting the stage for a perpetual tension between the nation state and national culture and the globalising tendencies of capitalist modernity. Yet at the political and cultural level, notions of national sovereignty remain overwhelmingly privileged, as concerns over supranational centralisations of power within Europe, testify. In terms of its production (financing, personnel, cultural influences) and consumption, cinema is also embedded in the contradictory dynamics of the national and international arenas. But again, much writing about cinema has made the national space, often conceived in quite hermetic terms, the privileged focus of discussion.

If globalisation describes the internationalising dynamics of capitalism, its effects have also been felt ‘below’ the level of the nation state where various forms of regional and local initiatives seek some relative autonomy from the national political and economic framework and reposition themselves in relation to global dynamics. This raises the question about whether one should be writing about “British” cinema at all. Whatever institutional and legal force Britishness has, it is clear that most discussions of British cinema are actually discussions of English cinema. It may make increasing sense to talk of an English cinema, a Scottish cinema, and a Welsh cinema in the future, but we can never simply replace an English dominated British cinema with more ‘devolved’ particularities. The key question of who is being represented within for example, Scottish cinema, remains. Indeed it may be perverse to ditch ‘Britishness’ after such a long struggle to open up its ethnocentric biases in favour of terms that may help reconstitute ethnocentrism within a *smaller unit* of identity.

### **Modernity, Tradition and Marxism**

Central to recent writings on modernity has been a welcome emphasis on its deeply contradictory nature. In his magisterial All That Is Solid Melts Into

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<sup>16</sup> A. Giddens, Modernity and Self Identity, Self and Society in the Late Modern Age Polity, Cambridge, 1993, p.20.

Air 17 Marshall Berman returns to nineteenth century writers to try and recapture their sense of the ambivalence of modernity. 18 He suggests that by contrast, in the twentieth century a certain polarisation has taken shape. In the work of the Frankfurt School for example, the dialectic between rationality and irrationality has been replaced by what they saw as the domination of the latter in the guise of the former. This pessimism concerning modernity - understandable in the context of the industrial barbarism that was German Fascism - is countered by its cheerleaders. Here Berman ranks Alvin Toffler's FutureShock as a futurist rhapsody. 19 Yet even in these works the ambivalence of modernity is occasionally registered. In a minor key we can detect a persistent strain of anxiety in FutureShock's vision of protean change and the psychological stress that produces, 20 just as we can recover a subterranean utopian hope in the work of someone like Herbert Marcuse. Nevertheless, Berman's point remains fundamentally accurate. And writing at the beginning of the 1980s, Berman had another target in mind. For the polarised perspectives on modernity by writers working within its paradigm, 21 was reinforced by the postmodernist/post-structuralist critique of modernity, launched with increasing confidence in that decade from outside modernity's foundational assumptions. Lyotard's critique of "grand narratives" has been influential, 22 chiming in with a wider political pragmatism and contributing to the critique of such modernist epistemological values as 'truth' and 'essence'. 23

Despite this, Berman's project seems at one level to have been successful: the ambivalence of modernity has become the dominant motif in more recent contemporary cultural theory. Wagner for example insists on the "irreducibly double nature of modernity" 24 turning as it does around such binary tensions as liberty and discipline, individual and community, agency

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17 M. Berman, All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity Verso, London, 1983.

18 M. Berman, *ibid*, p.24

19 M. Berman, p.26

20 A. Toffler, FutureShock Bodley head, London, 1970, p.13.

21 Though members of the Frankfurt school may have operated quite close to the borders of such a paradigm, even Adorno can still be claimed as a modernist thinker. See P. Dews, "Adorno, Post-Structuralism and the Critique of Identity" in Mapping Ideology (ed) S. Zizek, Verso, London, 1994, pp.46-65.

22 J. F. Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: a report on knowledge Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984.

23 G. McLennan, "Post-Marxism and the 'Four Sins' of Modernist Theorizing" in New Left Review 218 July/August 1996, pp.53-74.

24 P. Wagner, A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline Routledge, London, 1994, p.8.

and structure, the local and the global. Yet if the contradictory nature of modernity has been put back on the agenda, how are we to explain and account for these contradictions? Via his reading of Marx's The Communist Manifesto, Marshall Berman grounds the experience of modernity as a permanent revolution in something rather banal: "the everyday workings of the bourgeois economy."<sup>25</sup> This is important because there are indications that writings on modernity are shifting towards richly descriptive accounts lacking ontological depth.<sup>26</sup> I would argue that we can only understand the roots of modernity's ambivalence by reinstating the Marxist category of the mode of production. It is this category which gives explanatory force to our experiences and representations of modernity. Conversely, without causal explanations of sufficient ontological depth, the category of modernity becomes sufficient in itself. We begin to lose sight of *why* modernity is as it is, seeking only to describe (and adapt to) the *way* it is. The ambivalence of modernity is transformed into the "human condition".

Understanding the mode of production is the fundamental prerequisite for understanding the contradictory conceptions of time, space and identity within capitalist modernity. At one level, the characteristic temporal orientation of capitalist modernity is future orientated, towards change and transformation of self and environment, the material underpinnings for discourses on and around "modernisation". The social relations of production under capitalism hugely expand and perpetually develop the forces of production under the twin imperatives of profit accumulation and competition. Berman, as eloquent as Marx in his portrayal of the bourgeoisie's energies, describes how they "hurtle masses of men, materials, and money up and down the earth, and erode or explode the foundations of everyone's lives as they go."<sup>27</sup> Such transformations encourage and require the development of science and technology, hence the association of the Enlightenment with the emergence of capitalism.

Marx's vision is a rather more substantive version of change than the vapid vision of technological developments, institutional change and promises of

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<sup>25</sup> M. Berman, op.cit., p.94

<sup>26</sup> See P. Wager, op. cit., or A. Giddens, The Consequences Of Modernity Polity Press/Blackwell, Cambridge, 1990, which rejects postmodernism, only to return to phenomenology.

<sup>27</sup> M. Berman, All That is Solid Melts Into Air op.cit., p.100.

future wealth which constitute the discourse and practice of “modernisation”, the dreams of progress which Benjamin savaged in his theses on the philosophy of history.<sup>28</sup> Of course, Marx’s praise for the “gigantic means of production and of exchange” which the bourgeoisie had “conjured up”, came with a heavy price, both for labour, which is traumatically forged and reforged and for the bourgeoisie whose historical terminus can be read in the runes of the new productive capacity of human kind.<sup>29</sup> For bourgeois social relations were now themselves fetters on those productive forces. The development (and blocking) of the productive forces (such as science) are profoundly marked by the profit motive (exchange value) rather than social use. History, if we do not simply equate it with calendrical time, has come to an *impasse*.

To construct one’s identity within modernity is to situate yourself within a deeply ambiguous process. For modernity, as many theorists have argued, constantly liquefies the very foundations of power, of right and of knowledge which it throws up.<sup>30</sup> Modernity, implies a future orientated process of change and development, and this can be a slippery guarantor of social order. For modernity’s only promise is that things will change rather than stay the same. In this context, national identities turn to the concept of ‘tradition’ for some resources of legitimation which stress continuity, and, if there is to be any change at all, gradualism. In The Invention of Tradition, a collection of authors identify the increasing tendency towards the invention of rituals, practices and symbols in Imperial Britain, particularly around the monarchy and in colonial India and Africa, towards the end of the C19th. This modern investment in invented traditions attempts to link relatively *novel* forms of power relations and exploitation, with continuity, with the past, with what has been, as a form of legitimation for what is, in a world premised on transience and change.<sup>31</sup>

According to Stuart Hall, the Englishness which was forged in the period of the Empire was a classic binary one, a “highly exclusive and exclusivist form of cultural identity” in which essentialising characteristics (mostly

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<sup>28</sup> W. Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” in Illuminations (ed) Hanah Arendt, Pimlico Press, London, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1985, p.85.

<sup>30</sup> P. Wagner, op.cit., p.158.

<sup>31</sup> E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.

positive) were ascribed to the English and essentialising characteristics (mostly inferior) were ascribed to the other. The English were white, the other was not, the English were masculine, the other was feminine, the English were disciplined and rational, the other was emotional or spiritual, the English were administrators, the other was administrated, the English were bourgeois, the other was not.<sup>32</sup> Best of all, the English were modern *and* traditional, while the other (if American) was either *too* modern or, if the colonised, *too* traditional and backward. One of the defining characteristics of Englishness/Britishness then is this ongoing process of negotiating the past with the present, the traditional with the modern. This is a negotiation which is filled with tensions and contradictions, as when for example, the colonial Other becomes a means of articulating a lament about British capitalist modernity and its discontents.<sup>33</sup> However, let us take a more recent, post-Imperial example of this negotiation between tradition and modernity and one which mobilises a different set of geo-cultural dynamics.

### **Time, Space and National Identity**

Consider this little story of globalisation and national identity.<sup>34</sup> When BMW took over the ailing British car company, Rover, the German parent company decided it was time to reposition the image of the car in the market. It was felt that Rover's image of elegance and comfort was starting to look a little outdated. At the same time, a bid from an advertising team that stressed a complete image overhaul was rejected by Rover and deemed too 'wacky'. Instead the contract for the advertisement went to a project that tried to reconcile the old and the new. "An Englishman In New York" (with soundtrack by Sting) featured an Englishman driving through said city, looking cool and reserved as he negotiates a strange environment. Class differences are hinted at between himself and some hostile looking Rollerbladers who also occupy the road. The advert ends with him driving out of a freight elevator and into a modern loft apartment. The loft conversion signifies an urbane 'artistic' middle class (lofts were used as

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<sup>32</sup> S. Hall, 'The Local and The Global: Globalization and Ethnicity' in Culture, Globalization and the World System (ed) A.D.King, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991, pp.20-21.

<sup>33</sup> J. M. Mackenzie, Orientalism, History, theory and the arts Manchester University Press, 1995. pp.55-59.

<sup>34</sup> Taken from a television programme, When Rover Met BMW transmitted on 12.11.96, BBC 2, 9.30pm-10.00pm.

workplaces and homes by New York artists during the 1960s), hence the piano which the driver passes and hits a few notes on, but also, because it is a conversion of an older manufacturing space, the loft evinces a nostalgia for what Zukin calls a “smaller past.”<sup>35</sup> Here, the certainties of unity, continuity and coherence can be re-established in a fast changing world, but the loft conversion also marks a symbolic reconciliation of capitalist divisions of labour: between home and work and even public and private, since the internal openness of the structure, “interrupted by few doors or walls, opens every area and every social function to all comers.”<sup>36</sup> Thus the loft conversion signifies an attempt construct a more “organic” social space.

Having parked the car, the Englishman is handed a cup of tea with a digestive biscuit served to him by his American girlfriend. He remains in the car and true to the Englishman’s less than amorous image, he turns his attention to the cricket on the television (thus raising the theoretical question of distancing and the media’s role in constructing cultural identities across national borders). Here modernity is figured as geographically external to the English, who travel into the modern (American) terrain without losing their essential (stereotypical) qualities. Bearing in mind the imbrication of the relationships Britain has with its geo-cultural Others, we can detect here the Imperial mindset which guards against the temptation to “go native”.

The boundaries and mediation between the modern and the traditional are policed by the car itself which is being marketed as both modern and traditional and which contains and unifies the driver’s sense of self while also bringing him into contact with new, diverse phenomena. This fusing of the old and the new represents an example of that concept of evolutionary progression which Benjamin was so critical of and to which we will return.<sup>37</sup> The transatlantic connection also reveals how much more ‘comfortable’ such a cultural exchange is for Britishness (with its Atlanticist orientations) than a European, let alone an Anglo-German trajectory, and effectively disavows some of the economics of global ownership and control for a post-Imperial economy of dwindling importance.

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<sup>35</sup> S. Zukin, Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1982, p.81.

<sup>36</sup> S. Zukin, op.cit., p.68.

<sup>37</sup> S. Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing, op.cit., pp.58-77.



This example is symptomatic of the two conceptualisations of time within capitalist modernity. One conceptualisation of time we may describe as constructing an organic continuum between the present and the past (the project of inventing traditions, reconciling tradition with modernity, integrating the old into the new). This conceptualisation is deeply ideological insofar as it legitimises the now by reconnecting it to those aspects of the past which are desirable because they seem to counter-balance the anxieties generated by the downsides of modernity. Cinematically, Local Hero is one of the clearest examples of this reconciliation between traditional continuities and communities, and modernist ruptures. The other conceptualisation we may describe as the tabula rasa, wiping the slate clean, starting from scratch, a clean clear break from the past (the project of modernisation again) and a projection of development into the future which simply sheds the problems and entanglements of the past. This response sets up of a binary opposition between tradition and modernity, or more recently, between modernity and postmodernity. This strategy, as we shall see, informs films such as Bhaji On The Beach and Wild West.

### **Philosophies of History: Some Politics.**

Such philosophies of history had important political and cultural implications for Benjamin (and against which his methodology of the constellation was a reply) and continues to have implications for us today. By the mid-C19th, the organic continuum was clearly associated with conservative forces seeking to guard against revolutionary change. This position had been mapped out as early as the late C18th by Edmund Burke, who was certainly no reactionary on many issues, but drew the line when it came to decisive ruptures with the past (hence his critique of the French Revolution). By the late C19th and early C20th, the other conceptualisation of time had infected the socialist camp of the Second International, at the heart of which stood the largest mass socialist party in the world, the German SDP. This conception of time envisaged that the necessity of revolution was now a thing of the past. Instead, the German SDP projected a linear development into the future whereby socialism, as the representative of modernity, would take over the institutions of capitalism

which would gradually shuffle off the historical stage. Capital however, was not reading from the same script. "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" Marx once famously wrote <sup>38</sup> and in 1914 it became clear that the ruling class traditions of imperialism and militarism were not a relic of the past. The hapless German SDP fell in behind its own national bourgeoisie and voted for war credits.

The young Benjamin opposed the First World War and fabricated various illnesses to avoid conscription. <sup>39</sup> By the time Benjamin had committed himself to Marxism in the late 1920s, the vulgar evolutionism of the Second International, briefly displaced by the Bolshevik success in backward Russia, was making a come back under Stalinism. It informed the Popular Front tactics used by the Communist Parties in both France and Spain. The idea of an alliance with the progressive bourgeoisie for example builds into political practice a gradualist theory of change quite antithetical to dialectical thinking. The logic runs like this: first defeat the Fascists, then establish proper bourgeois rule which will benefit the workers materially and culturally and then finally, at some always receding point in the future, comes socialism. This 'stages' theory does not grasp the complex relations and tensions between fascism, capitalism and socialism and instead assumes a linear development in which each stage will be left behind as the new stage emerges according to some teleological plan. <sup>40</sup> Benjamin, then living in Paris, observed the practical effect of the Popular Front's tactics at first hand and dismayed at its pragmatic crushing - in the name of bourgeois stability - of the utopian possibilities of a great historical leap glimpsed in the wave of workers strikes which broke out in 1935. <sup>41</sup> These twin concepts of time - seamless continuity and abrupt breaks - are still dominant today. Seamless continuity is still predominant in the dominant imagined communities of national identity, while postmodernism is premised on an epochal break with modernity and modernism.

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<sup>38</sup> K.Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte Lawrence And Wishart, London, 1984, p.10.

<sup>39</sup> H. Caygill, A. Coles and A. Klimowski, Walter Benjamin For Beginners Icon Books, Duxford, 1998, pp.26-30.

<sup>40</sup> J. Rees, The Algebra of Revolution, The Dialectic And The Classical Marxist Tradition Routledge, London, 1998, pp.126-169.

<sup>41</sup> S. Buck-Morss, op.cit., pp.320-322.

## Benjamin and Marx

Walter Benjamin was one of the first critics to identify the intermingling of the new and the old in the “collective consciousness” and linked this dynamic back to the mode of production.<sup>42</sup> The images and representations stored in the “collective consciousness” seek to transcend “the deficiencies of the social order of production.”<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere Benjamin made a distinction between the collective *unconscious* and the consciousness of the collective.<sup>44</sup> The latter remains half asleep, only fitfully aware of itself under the atomising impact on thought and practice exerted by capitalism. The consciousness of the collective is disturbed by the collective unconscious in a double sense. Disturbed in the sense of half aroused by its stimulation, or what Benjamin called innervation;<sup>45</sup> and disturbed in the sense of provoking anxiety. For the *wish-images* which the collective unconscious generates can only force their way into actual expression at the cost of considerable disguise and distortion. As Buck-Morss notes, the Freudian unconscious defines the dream as “a (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly the dreams or wish-images of the collective unconscious are a site of expression and repression. They are compromise structures precisely because consciousness of our collectivity is disavowed, driven into hiding as the guilty, shameful secret of bourgeois class society. The collective unconscious has two other components inextricably linked to an affirmation of the socialisation of production and consumption. There is the desire for a reconciliation with nature (and one of the key wish-images which this study explores is the organic community); and there is the desire to see the emancipatory potentialities of technology fulfilled ( an important component in the promises of modernity).

Benjamin found in Marx a similar distinction and dynamic between the collective unconscious and the consciousness of the collective. As Marx put it:

“Our motto must be...Reform of consciousness not by means of dogmas, but by analysing the mystical consciousness unclear to

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<sup>42</sup> W. Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet In The Age Of High Capitalism New Left Books, London, 1973, p.159.

<sup>43</sup> W. Benjamin, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> S. Buck-Morss, *op.cit.*, p.118.

<sup>45</sup> S. Buck-Morss, *op.cit.*, p.117.

<sup>46</sup> S. Buck-Morss, *ibid.*, p.282.

itself, whether it appears religiously or politically. It will then become clear that the world has long possessed in the form of a dream something of which it only has to become conscious in order to possess it in reality.” 47

We have then through the metaphor of the dream and the theory of the (collective) unconscious the means to link culture back to the mode of production. Wish images are generated by the extraordinary, although historically determined, productive capacity of human beings engaged in particular relations of labour and living. Both the forces *and* relations of production have two faces. The *social relations* generate new forms of collectivity (bringing people into elaborate modes of co-operation) and disavow those collectivities (hurling people into competition). The *forces of production* demonstrate human beings (re)shaping their world and yet all the old foes of the past (hunger, poverty, disease, war, oppression, alienation) not only remain, but have become in many cases more systemic and industrialised. It is this *dialectical* relationship which accounts for the “ambivalence” of modernity which many theorists identify but fail to link back to the mode of production.

Thus, under capitalist modernity, our socioeconomic, political and cultural relations, become ever more elaborate, ever more intricate, ever more extensive over ever wider geographical areas. Yet, even as our relationships and therefore our interdependence becomes more global, so the whole purpose of those relationships is geared towards the pursuit of private interests, colliding with and as Marx puts it, *indifferent* to one another. Marx writes that our social relations are carried in our pockets, 48 and at this level, our collective identities are repressed. As a category, the collective unconscious should not eclipse the individual just because capitalism pays lip service to the individual. Despite its emphasis on private interests and the individual, capitalism involves vast collective organisation. Thus the association of modernity with a process of individualisation is too simple and one-sided. The difficulty is that this organisation is undemocratically coordinated, thus the world appears objectified and reified, external to and bearing over the individual subject.

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47 K. Marx, quoted in S. Buck-Morss, op.cit., p.281.

48 K. Marx, Marx's Grundrisse (ed) D. McLellan, Paladin, St. Albans, 1973, p.77.

For Benjamin, the utopian potential of the now is folded back into the past, and not only because of the impasse the social relations have driven history. As Susan Buck-Morss puts it:

“...if future history is not determined and thus its forms are still unknown, if consciousness cannot transcend the horizons of its socio-historical context, then where else *but* to the dead past can imagination turn in order to conceptualize a world that is “not-yet”?” 49

This projection back into the past bypasses the *immediate* past (variably constructed) for this immediate past is precisely that which has become unusable for utopian hopes, and indeed represents that which the wish-images strive to break free from. As Benjamin puts it:

“there also emerges in these wish images a positive striving to set themselves off from the outdated - that means, however, the most recent past.” 50

Thus a modernist Oedipal rejection of immediate predecessors requires a compensating ‘return’ or recovery of more distant ancestors. This past discharges the as yet *unrealised* promise of a classless society by either valorising the ancestors as more authentic (often by affirming some form of community which the latest stage of capitalism has dismembered) or using the past as an image of constraint or limitation which (particularly for the individual) has to be transcended. Very often, there can be a confused mingling of both impulses.

What is extraordinary, particularly given Benjamin’s reputation as a “most peculiar Marxist” 51, is how strikingly Marx anticipates Benjamin’s hermeneutic procedure. In the Grundrisse for example, Marx decodes the eighteenth century image of the “individual and isolated hunter or fisher” which underpins the economic treatises of Smith and Ricardo and literary works alike.

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49 S. Buck-Morss, op.cit., p.124.

50 Quoted in S. Buck-Morss, op.cit., p.114.

51 H. Arendt, “Introduction” to Illuminations, op.cit., p.16.

“They are Robinson Crusoe stories which do not by any means represent, as students of the history of civilization imagine, a reaction against over-refinement and a return to a misunderstood natural life.” <sup>52</sup>

Marx is warning us not to be misled by the primitive *mise en scene*, for these “stories” are not to be taken as a rejection of modernity: quite the contrary. The category of the individual acting on the natural world as a “mere means to his private ends” <sup>53</sup> emerges at the juncture of world-historical ruptures: “the dissolution of the feudal form of society” and the rise of “the new forces of production.” <sup>54</sup> The return, as a representation, to a primitive scene actually articulates the *contemporary break with that which is recently outdated*, by prising the individual away from the network of social relations and hierarchies which constituted the old (feudal) order.

“In this society of free competition the individual appears free from the bonds of nature, etc., which in former epochs of history made him part of a definite, limited human conglomeration.” <sup>55</sup>

This liberation of the individual by modernity from some “limited human conglomeration” is evident in different ways in many of the cinematic texts I will be exploring, just as conversely, the impulse to return to some “human conglomeration” as a response to some of the less liberating effects of capitalist modernity, is equally prevalent in the cinematic texts to be discussed.

We should note how politically ambivalent this return to the past and this tapping into the thwarted revolutionary potential in the present, is. On the one hand there is a transcendent, revolutionary, utopian impulse at work: the aspiration towards individual freedom and autonomy. But on the other hand, Marx warns that this eighteenth century conception of the individual “appears as an ideal whose existence belongs to the past; not as a result of history, but its starting point.” <sup>56</sup> The projection back into the distant past,

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<sup>52</sup> K. Marx, Marx's Grundrisse op.cit., p.26.

<sup>53</sup> K. Marx, *ibid*, p.27.

<sup>54</sup> K. Marx, *ibid*.

<sup>55</sup> K. Marx, p.27.

<sup>56</sup> K. Marx, *ibid*.

naturalises what is a historical rupture in the continuity of feudal social relations, in order precisely to disavow the possibility that capitalism too may be historically relative and transient.

A cinematic example of these dynamics will be examined in my discussion of The Private Life of Henry VIII (A. Korda, 1933) I argue that this is a film that emerges precisely at a point of rupture and crisis: essentially the end of the *laissez-faire* capitalism on which the British Empire had been founded. Within this profoundly traumatic context, the immediate past is outdated, lying in the ruins of the Great Depression. The film thus returns to the distant past, in this case, the “wish-images” are of Tudor England; a return which both affirms and naturalizes a certain historical continuity *and* expresses the revolutionary ruptures and dislocations of the early 1930s. And this complex temporal dynamic is imbricated with a paradoxical spatial dynamic. It is a most peculiar film as we shall see, simultaneously closing inwards into a core England, retreating into a new insularity and yet also opening outwards and embracing international cultural currents.

A political example of this temporal dynamic can be found even in the consciously ideologically driven reconciliation between past and present that Thatcherism constructed. It launched a critique of the immediate past, (in this case) the post-Second World War social order and returned to ‘Victorian values’. This operation attempted to clear the historical stage of those bureaucratic and professional elites spawned by the growth of the state, by returning to an age of minimal government interference in the economy (*laissez-faire* once more). This constituted a partial vision of a classless society (and herein lay part of its popular appeal) and a bizarre reworking of the Marxian idea that the state is an oppressive force.<sup>57</sup> It is bizarre because Thatcherism’s anti-statism was coupled, quite consciously, with a call to replicate the class brutality of the “free” market prior to the concessions wrung out of capital by organised labour. And this required a very selective ‘withering’ of the state (i.e. its welfarist, public service components were undermined while its coercive apparatus was expanded). And again we have a peculiar spatial dynamic in which Thatcherism both retreats to a core English identity while at the same time opening Britishness up to international cultural and political currents (Reaganite America, Japanese multinationals, etc).

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<sup>57</sup> V. I. Lenin, The State And Revolution Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1973.

## Utopianism and Film

Benjamin's emphasis on the past helps us to understand the peculiarly ambivalent and backward looking utopianism of British cinema and culture. This is evident not only in films located in the historical past, but also those films which have a setting contemporary to their own moment of production but which include "archaic" social relations (eg Funny Bones, Shirley Valentine, The Disappearance Of Finbar). This is the cultural equivalent of what Trotsky called combined and uneven development,<sup>58</sup> which is in fact the material substratum for the temporal mode of utopianism, whether projected forwards or backwards in time. While it has been argued that the emergence of a postmodern era has encouraged the spatial thinking so long repressed under the linear temporality of modernity,<sup>59</sup> it seems clear from Trotsky's spatialisation of time, itself congruent with Benjamin's Surrealist emphasis on juxtaposition to counter myths of evolutionary progression in history,<sup>60</sup> that spatial thinking was never entirely alien to either modernity, Modernism or Marxism.

In his discussion of the importance of utopianism in mass culture, Fredric Jameson has argued that in order to legitimate the existing social order ("or some worse one"), mass culture must give "rudimentary expression" to the "most fundamental hopes and fantasies of the collectivity" precisely so those hopes may be incorporated within and thereby give real power to the status quo and/or the new directions (modernisations) in development.<sup>61</sup> While Jameson is somewhat functionalist in how he views mass culture (writing of its "programming" and "deprogramming" of the spectator), his argument is useful for conceptualising the relations between a transcendent critique of the social order and an ideological accommodation to it, evident in popular culture. Mapping the tensions and reconciliations between the

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<sup>58</sup> B. Knei-Paz, The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1978, pp.62-107.

<sup>59</sup> E. W. Soja, Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory Verso London, 1989. Soja does admit in passing that the "classical Marxist tradition of Lenin, Luxembourg and Trotsky, showed great sensitivity to geographical issues" (p. 32) but he does not explore the implications of this for his thesis concerning postmodernism.

<sup>60</sup> For an discussion of the correspondences between Trotsky and Benjamin, see T. Eagleton's, Walter Benjamin Or Towards A Revolutionary Criticism , Verso, London, 1994, pp.173-179.

<sup>61</sup> F. Jameson, "Reification And Utopia In Mass Culture" in Signatures of the Visible Routledge, London, 1992, p.30.



ideological and utopian components of popular culture remains one of the key tasks of cultural criticism. It is also one of the most difficult to sustain, the temptation being to finally stress one at the expense of the other.<sup>62</sup> But what are those “fundamental hopes and fantasies” which Jameson alludes to and how are they articulated in film?

Here Richard Dyer’s seminal essay on utopianism in the Hollywood musical specifically and Hollywood cinema generally, is of some use.<sup>63</sup> Dyer identified five categories of utopian desire. Energy (the transcendence of exhaustion) intensity (a vivid ability to feel and respond to life, to overcome monotony), transparency (honesty, openness in our relations to individuals and institutions), abundance (as against scarcity) and community (as against isolation and fragmentation). These utopian desires are fostered as much by cinematic *forms* as in the content of the films. For example, transparency is an effect of a narrative *structure* in which the characters’ move from a condition of misunderstanding, confronted by enigmas, to full knowledge; a movement paralleled by the spectator’s trajectory from incomplete knowledge of events, motivations and salient information, to apparently complete knowledge or transparency vis-a-vis these factors. While Dyer’s categories have some applicability to British cinema, especially transparency and community, we need to be cautious about simply transposing these categories, which were specifically developed for the analysis of Hollywood, onto British cinema.

As Alan O’ Shea has noted in his essay which redeploys Dyer’s analysis (written in the 1970s) in relation to more recent Hollywood films, the emphasis on human agency, transformation of self and environment, progress and emancipation, makes Hollywood’s utopianism, distinctly modernist. (It’s postmodern elements, O’Shea argues, correctly in my view, far from being a cultural dominant, as Jameson suggests, is a rather marginal cultural eddy, evident for example in the way the same cluster of

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<sup>62</sup> Pam Cook for example traces a recurrent suspicion within Left film theory that popular culture is a “repository of reactionary or regressive ideologies.” She takes Andrew Higson to task for failing to recognise that pastoral and nostalgic discourses in British film culture need not always have conservative overtones. Fine, but her own analysis of costume in historical melodramas arguably bends the stick back too far the other way and evacuates ideology critique altogether. See Fashioning the Nation, Costume and Identity in British Cinema BFI, London, 1996, pp.24-28.

<sup>63</sup> R. Dyer, “Entertainment and Utopia” in Movies and Methods Vol.2 (ed) B. Nichols, University of California Press, 1985.

postmodern texts get recycled in critical discourses).<sup>64</sup> British cinema on the other hand, with its emphasis on sacrifice rather than the achievement of desires, on social structure over individual agency, on stasis rather than change, frequently offers a distinctly *anti-modernist* utopianism. Yet just as we cannot uncritically valorise Hollywood's modernist utopianism, entwined as it is with nationalism, racism, individualism and masculinism,<sup>65</sup> so we cannot easily dismiss British cinema's anti-modernist utopianism as irredeemably reactionary. A Benjaminian analysis helps us to extract what is progressive in the latent critique of modernity in British cinema, as well as understand the peculiar lines of complicity anti-modernism has *with* modernity.

### **The Organic Community**

The image of 'tradition' which I want to investigate has a particularly important role in British national identity: the organic community. A useful way of thinking about how the organic community manifests itself is provided by drawing on Bakhtin's notion of the *ideologeme* or idea-system.<sup>66</sup> The ideologeme, as Fredric Jameson has elaborated it, is to be understood as both a doctrine or abstract set of ideas *and* a narrative or proto narrative. In its abstract, conceptual manifestation as doctrine, it is at work in philosophy, sociology or cultural analysis, although even here it carries with it an implicit story (eg about decline or unfulfilled desire) just as any fictional narrative also encodes within it certain abstract doctrines.<sup>67</sup> Via Benjamin, we have seen that the modernity/tradition couplet are profoundly ambivalent terms: their dynamics can be best represented by splitting each term into its positive and negative manifestation. This is represented by figure one.

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<sup>64</sup> A. O' Shea, "What A Day For A Daydream, Modernity, cinema and the popular imagination in the late twentieth century" in Modern Times, reflections on a century of English modernity (ed) M. Nava and A. O' Shea, Routledge, London, 1996.

<sup>65</sup> A. O'Shea, *ibid*, p.244.

<sup>66</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination (ed) M. Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1992, p.429.

<sup>67</sup> F. Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act Routledge, London 1989, p.87.

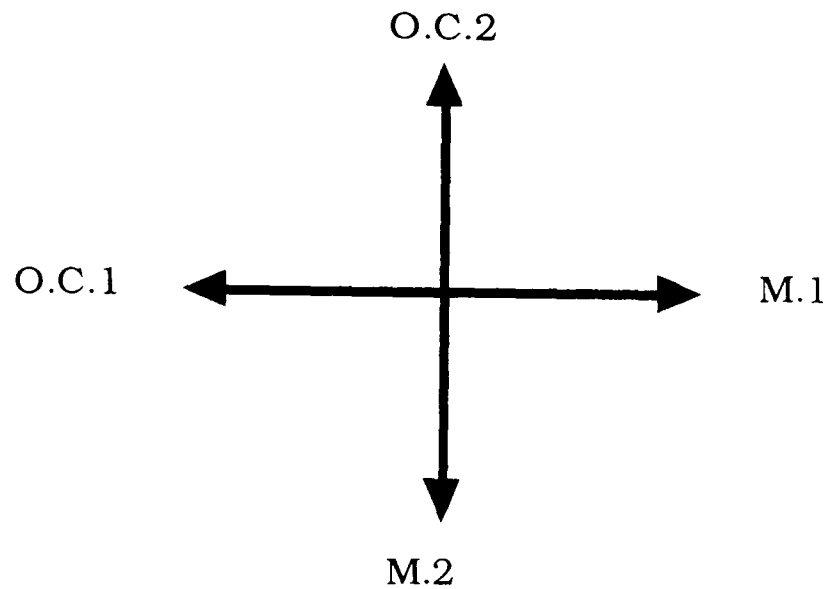


Fig. One

In its positive manifestation (O.C.1) the organic community approximates that “libidinal rationality” which Marcuse held out as a utopian reconciliation between affect and reason, desire and social convention.<sup>68</sup> Yet while Marcuse projected this concept into a radically transformed future the organic community recovers it in the past. The problem with the organic community - as with all utopias located in the past or for that matter, the present - is the problem of premature closure. Resisting such closure and deploying the concept in a critical way means keeping faith with the Greek origins of the word which mean, literally, a no-place, one that does not actually exist.

However, although premature, the closure of the organic community is never complete because of its internal tensions and the contradictory role it plays within capitalist modernity. The organic community (at O.C.1) functions as a critique of modernity by recovering what has been lost: essentially a social, cultural and psychical reconciliation. But at the very moment that the fantasy is formed, fantasy, difference (with what is) per se, must be blocked. For the organic community cannot figure any desire that overruns the established order, that is surplus to and comes up against the internal hierarchies and constraints of the organic community. Thus the organic community oscillates between being an image of authenticity and a

<sup>68</sup> H. Marcuse, Eros and Civilization: A philosophical inquiry into Freud. Ark Paperbacks, London, 1987, p.199.

hierarchical, constraining social order (Marx's "limited human conglomeration"). Both images are to be found in The Private Life Of Henry VIII as we shall see. While this film is extremely ambivalent about the weight of tradition, expectation and social roles, embodying in the character of Henry himself a dialectic between desire and Law, plebeian and aristocratic class identities, another Korda film is much more committed to upholding the O.C.2 'face' of the organic community.

The Four Feathers was produced by Alexander Korda and directed by Zoltan Korda in 1939. On the eve of the Second World War, the film constructs a parallel with the British colonial wars of the late C19th century. In the film Harry, whose family is steeped in an aristocratic tradition of British military campaigning, is engaged to marry Ethne. On the eve of his Company's leaving for Sudan to fight in Kitchener's army, Harry resigns his commission. He declares to Ethne that he wants to spend time with her and his recently deceased father's estate which has, he informs us, declined from long neglect (echoes here of Britain's Imperial decline). Ethne however does not believe he has done the proper thing and gives him a speech which may stand as a virtual manifesto of the organic community at O.C. 2:

"I know Harry, we've talked and dreamed of the things we would do if we were free. Some people are born free - they can do what they like without concern for the consequences. But you were not born free Harry and nor was I. We were born into a tradition, a code which we must obey even if we do not believe. And we must obey it Harry because the pride and happiness of everyone surrounding us depends on our obedience."

While the organic community and modernity appear to be antithetical, they are in fact the mirror image of each other. In its static quality, the organic community mimes what Benjamin called, capitalist modernity's empty time, the always-the-same logic of the commodity form.<sup>69</sup> Desire and fantasy is integral to the organic community (it is itself a fantasy) just as it is to capitalist modernity (desire oils consumer capitalism) while at the same time in one as in the other, desire and fantasy may come into sharp contradiction with the social order and its fetters. In both the organic community and modernity there is always the potential for desire to become

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<sup>69</sup> S. Buck-Morss, op.cit., pp.191-193.

*unstitched* from the existing social fabric, the existing social order. Thus modernity becomes a progressive opening up of the closed, static, inward and stultifying elements of the organic social order; an opening up towards those very social relations which produces the division of labour and frustrations of desire represented by M.2 and thus the return journey *back* to the organic community as the utopian promises of modernity (M.1) itself turns dystopian (M.2).

What O.C.2 and M.2 represent is the fissure between self and society, the alienation of the former when the latter becomes a mode of domination. Here it is worth indicating an important difference between Hollywood and British cinema. Central to the popular appeal of Hollywood and its ideology of the subject, is the way it casts the individual as able to (re)shape the world according to their desire(s). Here we have, from one perspective, a fetishism of emotion, feeling, affect, will and psychology issuing forth from a vision of agency divorced from social structures. By contrast British cinema - and this of course is central to its cultural difficulties in engaging with the popular - consistently and compulsively expresses the other half of bourgeois philosophy (the aesthetic counterpart of which Lukacs diagnosed as naturalism), <sup>70</sup> a reification of the social (exemplified by Ethne's speech) whereby its determinations on the individual, particularly its class determinants, is more or less complete. Thus sacrifice may be said to be the key motif of British cinema. Perhaps though sacrifice is too dramatic and grand a term for our British heroes and heroines; perhaps, taking our cue from Ethne, *resignation* would better describe this structure of feeling. The aesthetic counterpart to this is a naturalistic "realism", evident for example in the obsession with detail at the level of the *mise-en-scene*, almost as if the dedication to the minutia of the scene produces a density of social determination, an iron cage of detail, from which there is no escape.

Where as Hollywood cinema finds it difficult to represent social determinations 'objectively' (i.e. independent of human will) British cinema finds it difficult to represent the subjective, creative dimension to individual and collective will and agency and instead asserts the all encompassing power of the *given* social order. From this perspective, Hollywood's fetishism of will, its voluntarism, is a necessary corrective to the stasis of the class

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<sup>70</sup> The classic analysis of naturalism's limitations is provided by G. Lukacs, in 'Narrate or Describe?' *Writer and Critic*, Merlin Press, London, 1978, pp.110-148.

structure projected in British films. And it is precisely this feature which has attracted British working class audiences to Hollywood. The exceptions to this reification of structure within British cinema are precisely those cultural currents which have in recent years received critical valorisation and which stress fantasy, subjectivity and (briefly) in the case of Black British film and film criticism, even the avant-garde. Nevertheless, in the dialogue between Hollywood and British cinema, I shall also argue that there is something to be said and even a progressive potential in the attention which British cinema pays to the structural constraints on human action as a necessary corrective to Hollywood's modernist optimism.

### **Spectatorship**

This study is organised around a set of lateral and interacting chapters and themes rather than a linear history, an approach to British Cinema suggested by Raymond Williams, but rarely adopted.<sup>71</sup> It is divided into two main parts. The first, which looks at the question of spectatorship, is organised across two chapters, dealing respectively, for reasons yet to be elaborated, with the early 1930s and with the post -1979 era. The concept of the spectator was initially theorised in the 1970s with a strong emphasis on the way the text *positioned* the spectator.<sup>72</sup> Conversely, audience studies, which became popular in the 1980s, tend to focus on the self perceptions and responses of the cultural consumers themselves. Valuable as this is as a corrective to textual determinism, it fails to establish what Bourdieu calls the 'horizon of expectation'<sup>73</sup> about the self and about the world that audiences live in. As Bourdieu notes, "the very least that needs to be added to reception theories... is the question of where that 'horizon' comes from"<sup>74</sup> In part, that horizon comes from the texts which are consumed - but only in part. What both the textual approach and audience studies usually omit, is the wider historical context in which texts circulate and audiences consume. Thus by spectatorship I mean textual analysis which is sensitive

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<sup>71</sup> R. Williams, "British Film History: New Perspectives" in British Cinema History (eds) J. Curran and V. Porter, Barnes & Noble Books, New Jersey, 1983, pp.11-12.

<sup>72</sup> See P. Willemen, "Notes on Subjectivity, On Reading Edward Branigan's 'Subjectivity Under Siege' in Screen, Vol. 19, no.1, 1978, and A. Kuhn "Women's Genres" Screen vol. 25, no.1, 1984.

<sup>73</sup> P. Bourdieu, Acts of Resistance, Against the New Myths of Our Time Polity Press, Cambridge, 1988, p.49.

<sup>74</sup> P. Bourdieu, *ibid.*

to the historical context of reception. <sup>75</sup>

In both chapters the evidence I will be drawing on to link text and spectatorship with that wider historical context are: (in order of importance): film texts, contemporaneous (political) writings and (in the case of the 1930s) retrospective writings, film reviews and audience studies. While the last two types of evidence gesture towards some empirical anchorage to spectatorship, I recognise that my arguments must be seen as speculative and suggestive rather than definitive. By the same token, without a theoretical framework for reception, empirical research into audiences cannot even begin to formulate its own questions.

The relationship between text, spectatorship, historical context and Bourdieu's horizon of expectation, raises the question of hegemony, that is the struggle for intellectual-moral leadership over the direction of social life. During the late 1920s and 1930s, Antonio Gramsci discussed the importance of culture and "common sense" as battlegrounds in the struggle for hegemony. <sup>76</sup> However, the way Gramscian analysis was imported into cultural studies during the 1970s and 1980s was problematic. There was a tendency for culture to be seen to be as important as the political sphere, the *key* site of struggle. Leaving aside the practical implications of subsuming political struggle into cultural struggle, making culture equivalent to politics actually failed to accord each of these very *different* spheres their due specificity. To make cultural production/consumption as important a site of struggle as political ideas, values, etc, actually forced cultural analysis into a somewhat functionalist position whereby it had to be demonstrated that culture helped reproduce the hegemony of the dominant classes. <sup>77</sup> During the 1980s, the problems with this position led to a rapid retreat from such functionalist approaches, but only so as to adopt a mirror-image position which is equally problematic whereby culture is celebrated as a site of resistance while ideology-critique is scaled down and treated as hopelessly elitist and out of touch with the plurality and

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<sup>75</sup> J. Staiger, Interpreting Films, Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1992.

<sup>76</sup> A. Gramsci, "The Study Of Philosophy" in The Modern Prince and other writings Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1967.

<sup>77</sup> N. Abercrombie, S.Hill, B.S. Turner, The Dominant Ideology Thesis Allen & Unwin, London, 1980, pp.11-15.

semiotic pliability of popular culture. <sup>78</sup>

My position is this: under advanced capitalism, social life is increasingly complex and sub-divided by an elaborate division of labour in which different sectors of society, with their institutions and organisations, their habits and cultures, develop their own *mediations* of the mode of production. The concept of mediation is crucial if one is to avoid reducing culture to the economic or political spheres. Thus cultural production and consumption are not equivalent to political praxis. One of the key differences between the two, is that political discourses and policies, particularly, the closer they get to power and implementation, operate within the fairly narrow set of parameters and pressures exerted by bourgeois property relations at any one time, where as cultural texts *may* operate within greater latitudes precisely because they are distant from any direct, practical impact on social life. This has implications when thinking about the relationship and difference between cinematic-text and spectatorship and political identification. Whereas politicians tend to gloss over contradictions in our lives because they want us to re elect them, films often have a little more space to offer images and imaginings which are more ambivalent, more complicated; perhaps tapping into anxieties we have about society, but do not always admit, or let our politicians admit to us. Film therefore may have greater scope for working with the contradictory consciousness of the spectator <sup>79</sup> than politics has of acknowledging such contradictions within the citizen. Thus both the 1930s and 1980s are periods of Conservative Party hegemony, but this does not translate into hegemony in all fields of social and cultural life. My discussion of spectatorship then will implicitly acknowledge that culture *is* a site of struggle, while avoiding the twin extremes of seeing it as *the* crucial mode of integrating people into the social order or as an ideology free site of resistance to the social order.

In my discussion of the early 1930s I explore spectatorship as a dialectic between positioning and movement, constraint and mobility. The spectator lies at the intersection of numerous determinants on their identity. <sup>80</sup> The two I will be discussing are class and gender, two key identities in that

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<sup>78</sup> A. O' Shea and B. Schwarz, "Reconsidering Popular Culture" Screen vol.28, no.3, 1987.

<sup>79</sup> A. Gramsci, "The Study Of Philosophy" *op.cit.*, pp.66-67.

<sup>80</sup> J. Staiger, Interpreting Films, *op.cit.*, p.47.



period. Under what historical conditions are semantic boundaries of class and gender forged on the one hand and crossed/transgressed on the other? The organic community as a structuring principle for the text/spectator will be discussed in relation to The Private Life of Henry VIII (A. Korda, 1933). The organic community provides a cultural map to negotiate a troubled modernity. The contradictions within that map and the implications for the spectator's semantic travels, will be explored. How does a sign, say the cluster of signs that cohere to produce the image of Henry VIII, get articulated within the contours of a national culture generally and a cinematic language specifically? To what extent is the national culture interacting with significant others, such as America and Europe and with what implications for interpreting spectatorship? These are the key questions I will be exploring.

In chapter two, I move onto the 1980s and explore the context of reception for Hollywood's dystopian science fiction films. Discussions of Hollywood cinema by British writers usually take for granted the proximity, familiarity and relevance of a cinema made many thousands of miles away. But it is precisely this familiarity which needs to be explained. There are books that have explored the appeal of Hollywood to working class audiences <sup>81</sup> and the connections between American culture and Britain within particular historical conjunctures, <sup>82</sup> but there has been little in the way of articulating detailed textual analysis of specific Hollywood texts with the British context of reception. This is what I attempt to do in this chapter. By focusing on three science fiction films, Aliens (J. Cameron, 1986), Robo Cop (Paul Verhoeven, 1987) and Total Recall (Paul Verhoeven, 1990), I am reversing the temporal dynamic of chapter one. There, I will explore how the collective unconscious, finds a distorted representation via returns to the distant past, while in chapter two, I explore the *fut-ur*.

In his dissection of capitalism and culture, one of Benjamin's strategies was to unearth the commodity as fossil, the failed material of a previous consumer landscape left behind by "modernisation". The fossil (to be found today in any "junk" shop) is a kind of petrified emblem of the dual nature

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<sup>81</sup> P. Swann, The Hollywood Feature Film In Postwar Britain St. Martin's Press, New York, 1987, pp.27-28 and pp.51-60.

<sup>82</sup> D. Webster, Looka Yonder, The Imaginary America Of Populist Culture Routledge/Comedia. London, 1988.

of the commodity; its very out datedness testifying to the *transitory* basis of the present, while as a precursor to later commodity forms, the fossil (such as the Paris Arcades) testifies to the commodity as *endless repetition*.

Benjamin sometimes referred to such material as *ur-phenomena*. Benjamin's concept of ur-phenomena was mediated through the work of Goethe and Georg Simmel.<sup>83</sup> Ur-phenomena are both clues as to the nature of the general social order from whence it came, and, if handled by the critical theorist as carefully as the archaeologist handles a find, can be seen as an anticipation of the very society and time in which the theorist is operating in.

If the ur-image casts light on the present by refracting it through the past, what I call the *fut-ur* image, casts light on the present by speculating on how it may, "unfold out of itself" into the future.<sup>84</sup> The science fiction films effectively construct the present for the spectator as a kind of fossil by their projections into the future in which the commodity as endless repetition (eg the Company in *Aliens*) is anxiously played out even as utopian alternatives are glimpsed or ideological reconciliations between traditional social relations (of class and gender) with the "innovations" of the commodity form are worked through. My argument is that these symbolic resources provide the British spectator with imaginary travels in semantic terrain highly relevant to the context of reception. British *produced* film culture (with its strong orientations towards the past) finds it difficult to tap into such developments at the cutting edge of capitalism.

## **Narratives**

In part two I return to British produced films in the post-1979 period whose narratives involve characters travelling into or out of the British national imaginary. Such narratives dramatise the cultural consequences and difficulties of travel and displacement. Thus I am exploring in the narratives the same questions I have been discussing in part one: namely how does Britishness negotiate the modernity/tradition couplet via relations with significant geo-cultural others and what are the class and gender implications of this cultural exchange/change? Once more the ideologeme of the organic community is central to my discussion, in particular its

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<sup>83</sup> S. Buck-Morss, op.cit., pp.71-73.

<sup>84</sup> W. Benjamin on the ur-phenomena, quoted by S. Buck-Morss, op.cit., p.73.

ambivalence as either a constraining/divided social order, or as an image of reconciliation/authenticity. Indeed we may see the organic community - with its roots in feudalism and its reconstruction within capitalist modernity, as an ur-image in which modernity's promises are either keenly anticipated or its failures force a return, in Zukin's phrase, to a "smaller past."

The focalisation of narrative travels through a male protagonist is significantly gendered in Local Hero (B. Forsyth, 1983) and Funny Bones (P. Chelsom, 1995). Both are as concerned with property, possession and Oedipal stories of succession and genealogy as they are with the themes of self realisation prevalent when women travel or come into contact with travelling men. The chapter on genealogical travels continues the themes of globalisation of commodity relations discussed in chapter two. In Local Hero and Funny Bones it is precisely the genealogy of Anglo-American capitalism which is at stake; these are narratives concerned to reconcile the son with the Father, the continuum of capitalist history with the ruptures of the present.

A new element is introduced in this section, reflecting the cultural advances of the post-1979 period: that of 'race' and ethnicity. The ethnicity of the other is often foregrounded as the clearest signifier of difference and, for a travelling white ethnicity, the ethnic other becomes a repository of desire and authenticity which has been lost at "home". For the women protagonists of Shirley Valentine, (L. Gilbert, 1989) and A Room With A View (J. Ivory, 1985) the ethnic Other functions as a kind of donor, in the structuralist sense, facilitating the realisation of self. Fiedler was one of the first writers to discuss how in the 1960s, modernisation, which had appeared to consign the Indian to the cultural margins of American life, was increasingly confronted with the return of its repressed.<sup>85</sup> In the post-1979 period, changes in capitalism, intensified globalizing dynamics and associated transformations in the gendered division of labour have been imaginatively transmogrified into narratives of travel (where the ethnic other is confronted) in which established relations between men and women come under pressure and alternative relations emerge.

If the films discussed in the chapters on genealogical and gendered travels

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<sup>85</sup> L. A. Fiedler, The Return Of The Vanishing American Jonathan Cape, London, 1968.

evinced a propensity to reconcile the ruptures of modernism with a social and cultural continuity, the chapter on diasporic travels, explores the opposite tendency in cultural theory and practice; that is to reject all such attempts to mend the temporal bridges of modernist upheaval. Instead, diaspora, as movement and change, is largely conceptualised in the British Asian films that I discuss, Wild West (D. Attwood, 1992) and Bhaji On The Beach (G. Charda, 1993), as a way of critiquing the assumed continuities with the past evident in so many imaginings of the national community.<sup>86</sup> While its critique of certain versions of identity and memory are persuasive and necessary, I argue that continuity, the past, cannot be easily rejected without tremendous political and personal costs. I also argue that urgent questions around social solidarity, around the concentration and accumulation of social power in terms of class, gender, 'race' and ethnicity, have been ill served by a vision of the world in perpetual flux and mobility, apparently moving too fast to pin down and contest. In this chapter I develop probably the most important argument in the thesis, in terms of the politics of theory. I suggest that recent theories, broadly informed by poststructuralism and postmodernism, have conflated cultural identity with consciousness. Indeed the latter term has virtually disappeared from cultural theory - squeezed out by the all pervasiveness of 'identity'. I will explore the implications of this and argue for the political necessity of analytically distinguishing between identity and consciousness.

In my final chapter on European travels, I return, in the context of moves towards European integration, to the question of film industry which I first raise in relation to the conditions of production determining The Private Life of Henry VIII. Thus this chapter constellates Hollywood's contemporary domination of world cinema with the 1930s. I also explore recent cultural and policy responses to that domination and the paradigms for British/European production on offer via a discussion of The Name Of The Rose (Jean Jacques-Annaud 1986) and The Disappearance Of Finbar (Sue Clayton 1997).

### **Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic of Modernity?**

Fredric Jameson's influential account of the postmodern offers a radically different view of the relationship between the old and the new and the

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<sup>86</sup> B. Anderson, Imagined Communities op.cit., p.4.

meaning of nostalgia, than we derive from a Benjaminian paradigm. One of the ironies of postmodernism is that it tells a classically modernist story of its own rise in linear terms and clean breaks. For Jameson, Postmodern culture corresponds to the logic of a third stage of capitalism: after national capitalism and monopoly capitalism comes multinational capitalism (at its earliest, the immediate post Second World War period). Susan Buck-Morss by contrast suggests that the modernism/postmodernism metanarrative<sup>87</sup> is best understood not as chronological events but as positions within the long epoch of modernity.<sup>88</sup> This chimes in with a Benjaminian conception of history that stresses structural contradictions being rearranged in new configurations. The plausibility of this argument can be demonstrated at a cultural level by a brief critique of Fredric Jameson's attempts to identify postmodernism/Postmodernism as distinctively new and as a break from the past. Let us take three examples of characteristics which Jameson ascribes to Postmodern art as features which distinguish it from Modernism.

The first example is Jameson's attempt to link Modernism exclusively with a monadic paradigm of identity. He does this by foregrounding the importance of authorial style in Modernism, the "invention of a personal, private style...organically linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity."<sup>89</sup> The decline of Modernism/modernism can then be linked to the decline of that older bourgeois individual subject, a decline which has been theorised by poststructuralist and postmodernist theories. However, what Jameson takes to be a characteristic split between Modernism and Postmodernism, can be seen more persuasively as an inherent structural tension *within* modernity and Modernism. The latter celebrated and constructed the autonomous, unique author on the one hand while the texts themselves (from Picasso to Joyce to T.S. Eliot) dissolved boundaries and opened themselves up to a polyphonic array of voices and perspectives which shattered the old monadic subject and undermined the notion of the private, self contained identity.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> I use the lower case for the broad social, economic and political forces associated with modernism/postmodernism and the uppercase Modernism/Postmodernism to indicate specific cultural characteristics or movements.

<sup>88</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, op.cit., p.359.

<sup>89</sup> F. Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" in Postmodern Culture (ed) H. Foster, Pluto Press, London, 1985, p.114.

<sup>90</sup> F. Moretti, "The Long Goodbye: *Ulysses* and the End of Liberal Capitalism" in Signs Taken For Wonders Verso, London, 1988, pp. 194-195.

Postmodernism/post structuralism has of course reproduced the same contradiction between texts and authors. <sup>91</sup>

Then there is Jameson's notion that Postmodernism is characterised by a pervasive nostalgia for the past, itself symptomatic of the way our relations with a knowable, coherent past from which we can learn, has been shattered. <sup>92</sup> While architectural Modernism was strongly future orientated, rupturing itself from the immediate past discredited by its association with class society and irrationality, <sup>93</sup> it also invested heavily in the primitive and in the ur-text of classicism. A similar combination between modern urban space and an obsession with primitivism, myths and past forms and styles is found in Surrealism. In modernism generally, technological developments are continually citing the past. The "restorative impulse" is evident in early photography which imitated painting, railroad cars designed like stage coaches and the first electric light bulbs that were shaped like gas flames. <sup>94</sup> In other words, nostalgia combined with rupture is a characteristic feature of modernism/Modernism.

For Jameson however, the explosion of a coherent monadic subject and the accelerating changes in the present which throws the past into crisis, feeds into a third component of Postmodern art: the "waning of affect." <sup>95</sup> Jameson argues that postmodernism sees a qualitatively new penetration of culture by economics, technology and social structures so that Postmodern culture evacuates emotion and subjectivity from its cultural forms. He makes this argument about affect via a discussion of Edvard Munch's classic Modernist painting, "The Scream". Here the lonely monad's angst cleaves through the subject and into the surroundings, rippling through to the expressionistic techniques of depiction. Under postmodernism, "the alienation of the subject is displaced by the latter's fragmentation." <sup>96</sup> Thus "The Scream" is compared with a Postmodern work such as Warhol's images of Monroe, where the latter is merely an image

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<sup>91</sup> See R. Barthes in fine authorial manner proclaiming "The Death of The Author", in Image, Music, Text, Fontana, London, 1977, and M. Foucault's more pragmatic acceptance of authorship as an institutionalised fiction, in "What Is An Author?" Screen, vol.20, no.7, 1979.

<sup>92</sup> F. Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" op.cit., p.125.

<sup>93</sup> M. Calinescu, Five Faces of Modernity Duke University Press, Durham, 1987, p.281.

<sup>94</sup> S. Buck-Morss, op.cit., p.111.

<sup>95</sup> F. Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" in Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Verso, 1991, London, p.10.

<sup>96</sup> F. Jameson, *ibid*, p.14.

fragment, recycled and reproduced in various colour combinations that diminish our sense of a psychologically complex human being. But, had Jameson chosen an example from the more analytical, 'rationalising' wing of Modernism, a John Heartfield, Mondrian, Moholy Nagy, El Lissitzky or Rodchenko, then the contrast with the evacuation of emotion and individual subjectivity from Postmodernism would have been rather less convincing.

The dialectic between authorial agency and collective cultural meaning, the prevalence of nostalgia and the waning of affect are all themes which resurface in Jameson's critique of the nostalgia film. If the postmodern "discovery" of nostalgia is to bear the enormous weight of argument that this is one of the surest signs of an epochal break from modernism, then, rather obviously, the production of nostalgia from the late C19th has to be either ignored or explained. Roland Robertson attempts to explain the anomaly by arguing that the "invention of traditions" which gathered pace between 1880 and 1920 was a politically driven manipulation of nostalgia by national elites, while the postmodern paradigm has focused attention on commercialised, consumer driven nostalgia.<sup>97</sup> The Private Life Of Henry VIII, Fire Over England (William Howard, 1936) and Tudor Rose (Robert Stevenson, 1936), to mention only the Tudor/Elizabethan cycle in the 1930s, suggests that commercialised nostalgia is somewhat older than the postmodern paradigm would have us believe.

But perhaps the quality of the nostalgia is different? Jameson argues that the individual author's possibility for original stylistic signatures of the modernist type (in film, Hitchcock, Eisenstein, Antonioni, etc) has become exhausted<sup>98</sup> and so the nostalgia film falls back into imitative pastiche. What is imitated in the nostalgia film is the stereotypes and imagery, the fashions and "bric-a-brac whose presence is characteristic of a given period as its celebrity-logoes"<sup>99</sup> rather than any genuine sense of historicity. Thus the heterogeneity which poststructuralism celebrates is reconfigured by Jameson as the random, eclectic collection of period markers, (equally evident in science fiction films such as Bladerunner (R. Scott, 1982)) and by other writers as stylistic and generic hybridity. Once more the question

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<sup>97</sup> R. Robertson, Globalization, Social Theory and Global Culture, Sage, London, 1992, pp.158-159.

<sup>98</sup> F. Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" op.cit. p.115.

<sup>99</sup> F. Jameson, "The Existence Of Italy" in Signatures Of The Visible op.cit., p.222.

occurs: is there anything new here or qualitatively new enough to support the argument for an *epochal* shift to the postmodern? It seems to me that exactly the same observation about eclecticism can and indeed was said of The Private Life Of Henry VIII. It was criticised by one C.R. Beard for its lack of historical accuracy and the fact that the costumes, weaponry and hair styles constituted an eclectic “hotch-pot” of all period styles.<sup>100</sup> Beard is concerned with historical accuracy, Jameson with the apparent impossibility of going “beyond” the image in a media saturated society, but the evidence that both point to, is remarkably similar despite the very different theoretical paradigms each are working with.

Since the nostalgia film represents not history but “the history of aesthetic styles”<sup>101</sup> and “the surface sheen of a period fashion”<sup>102</sup> the technology of image (re)production becomes an ever more important component in the reception of the Postmodern text. This “technological bonus of pleasure afforded by the new machinery”<sup>103</sup> means that now it is the very idea of consumption that is being consumed not only specific media products. This gives rise to some interesting cultural contradictions. At the level of content, a film like Terminator 2 (J. Cameron, 1991) is awash with anxiety about humanity’s relationship to technology while at the level of form, the film is indebted to technology and celebrates its capacity for extraordinary special effects. But again, this cannot bear the weight of an argument about an epochal shift out of capitalist modernity and there is a long tradition of technological innovation in cinema (widescreen, colour, sound) in which “means and ends”, the general pleasures of consumption as well as a specific product are sold to audiences. Indeed, this predates cinema and stretches back to the great exhibitions of the C19th which Benjamin analysed as the ur-form of the pleasure and media industries of the C20th. What was “sold” at these world fairs was precisely the “idea” of production and consumption, of abundance and social progress within capitalism.<sup>104</sup>

The “new gratification in surfaces” which Jameson detects in Postmodern culture is of course linked to the “silence of affect”, just as conversely,

<sup>100</sup> C.R. Beard, Sight and Sound Winter, 1934, pp.124-125.

<sup>101</sup> F. Jameson, “Postmodernism, Or The Cultural Logic Of Late Capitalism” op.cit., p.20.

<sup>102</sup> F. Jameson, “On Magic Realism” in Signatures... op.cit., p.130.

<sup>103</sup> F. Jameson, “Postmodernism And The Market” in Mapping Ideology (ed) S. Zizek, Verso/New Left Review, London, 1994, p.293, and “The Existence Of Italy”, op.cit., p.220.

<sup>104</sup> S. Buck-Morss, Dialectic Of Seeing, op.cit., pp.83-87.



Modernism required depth models like the unconscious for there to be any sense of anxiety or unease.<sup>105</sup> Since the nostalgia film articulates our relationship to images rather than history, the characters themselves are rendered passive and “contemplative” vis-a-vis events, for they do not make history, but take up their allotted place within its commodification by the image.<sup>106</sup> This contemplative quality is linked by Jameson to the melancholic quality of the nostalgia film. Evidence of melancholy would seem to contradict Jameson’s argument concerning the waning of affect. However, using The Godfather II (Francis Ford. Coppola, 1974) as an example, Jameson argues that the melancholy:

“is designed to place us in that “nostalgic” frame of mind in which we are most receptive to the inspection of old photos and the aesthetically distant contemplation of bygone fashions and scenes from the past.”<sup>107</sup>

Leaving aside the fact that this argument rests not so much on textual evidence than on an impressionistic judgment concerning the text’s reception, its application to the film in question produces an incredibly impoverished reading. Certainly John Hess’s analysis of the film, which explores the contradictions between capitalism and the family (an important theme in this study ) is more persuasive and productive,<sup>108</sup> while an earlier essay by Jameson, prior to his conversion to the postmodern paradigm, also acknowledged the political complexity of the film.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, one could more persuasively link the contemplative nature of the characters and the resulting melancholic tone of the film in question to the European art film<sup>110</sup> which Coppola is undoubtedly referencing fully as much as he is the European roots of the Italian-American,

The final point I want to make concerns the nub of the issue: whether we are experiencing an historical transition to the postmodern. Jameson suggests that the origins of capitalism in feudalism and the transition from

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<sup>105</sup> F. Jameson, “Diva and French Socialism”, in Signatures... op.cit., p.60.

<sup>106</sup> F. Jameson, “The Existence Of Italy”, op.cit., pp.222-223.

<sup>107</sup> F. Jameson, ibid, p.224.

<sup>108</sup> J. Hess, “Godfather II : A deal Coppola couldn’t refuse” in Movies and Methods. Vol.1 (ed) B. Nichols, University of California Press, 1976.

<sup>109</sup> F. Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture” op.cit., pp.33-34.

<sup>110</sup> D. Bordwell, “The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice” in Film Criticism vol.4, no.1, 1979.

feudalism to capitalism, constitutes something of the Freudian primal scene for the system.<sup>111</sup> This is hugely suggestive for any study of European/British film culture, although just how persuasive it is in understanding American cinema seems more questionable. Nevertheless, Jameson argues that taken together the nostalgia films which mobilise the imagery associated with the aristocratic “elegance and leisure class privilege” of the 1920s and the imagery of the labour-capital conflicts of the 1930s, constitutes an allegory of that ur-historical transition which in turn, Jameson reads as an allegory of the transition to the postmodern.<sup>112</sup> Thus Jameson is suggesting that he is extracting from the postmodern culture of the nostalgia film, the last, faintest signals of historicity before the complete commodification of culture triumphs. It should be evident that this idea of the postmodern as the completion or near completion of the process of commodification is an example of that linear philosophy of history which Benjamin was concerned to offer an alternative to.

What I want to suggest here is that the persistence of “feudal” or “archaic” social relations in British cinema may also be seen as replaying the primal scene for capitalism. *But*, and this is crucial, I do not see this as an allegory of epochal transition, but rather as a way of dramatising the tensions between “traditional” or established social relations and the perpetually disruptive emergent modernising dynamics of capitalism: and this tension persists *within and throughout the long epoch of capitalist modernity*. Thus Yanks (John Schlesinger, 1979) reworks the imagery of the primal scene with its narrative of a small, quasi-feudal village (complete with a Lady of the manor) being integrated into the global/modern events of the Second World War as a way of dramatising the transformations of gender beginning to gather pace in the late 1970s/early 1980s.

## Constellations

Postmodernism and poststructuralism are obvious examples of an endemic linearity in our thinking. As Stuart Hall notes, “we suffer increasingly from a process of historical amnesia in which we think that just because we are thinking about an idea it has only just started.”<sup>113</sup> Sometimes however not

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<sup>111</sup> F. Jameson, “The Existence of Italy”, op.cit., pp.227-228.

<sup>112</sup> F. Jameson, *ibid*, pp.225-229.

<sup>113</sup> S. Hall, “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity” op.cit., p.20.

even the ideas let alone the processes described, are new. Thus Hall's attempt a few pages later to characterise contemporary globalisation as American rather than English strikes one as a particularly strong case of amnesia.<sup>114</sup> The global mass culture which he talks about, crossing and recrossing linguistic frontiers, was alive and well in the 1930s when the oligopoly that was Hollywood had consolidated its home market and had been dominating foreign markets to the concern of the dominated, for at least a decade.

Benjamin's method of constellating historical moments is one way of tackling such linearity. History, like the business cycle, is the product of a) structural contradictions b) recycled in c) unique configurations. Walter Benjamin's notion of constellating two historical moments seeks to grasp the structural and the temporal, the similarities and the differences, the continuities and the changes which are flashed up by the clash of two eras. This conception of history means that at one level *any* constellation of two historical moments is potentially fruitful, generating meaning(s) by their abrupt friction as surely as any two disparate images will by their sudden collision. Yet at another level, certain constellations are more fruitful and make more sense, politically and objectively, than others. Thus the mutual interpenetration in this study between the 1930s and the post-1979 period, is far from arbitrary in what it hopes to reveal. Some of the key lines of continuity and difference can now be anticipated.

It is worth noting that there is, if inexactly, something of a critical link between the 1930s and the 1980s. The 1930s was arguably the high point of theoretical development for writers such as Benjamin, Brecht and Gramsci and their work was to provide the foundations for much cultural theory in the 1970s and 1980s. The English language translations of these writers first began to appear during the 1970s but perhaps their wider dissemination and absorption only begins to make itself felt during the late 1970s<sup>115</sup> and 1980s. For example, Eagleton's Walter Benjamin, Or Towards A Revolutionary Criticism was first published in 1981, Lunn's Marxism and Modernism was first published in 1982, while Buck-Morss's

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<sup>114</sup> S. Hall, *ibid*, p.27.

<sup>115</sup> For example Susan Buck-Morss, The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute, Macmillan, New York, 1977 and Aesthetics and Politics New Left Books, London, 1977.

Dialectics of Seeing, was published in 1989.

The critical links between the 1930s/1980s is underpinned by the political crises and shifts occurring during these decades. In the earlier period, *laissez-faire* capitalism is in crisis and is rapidly being supplanted by various forms of state intervention. The political complexions are different in each case, but in Roosevelt's America, Blum's France, Mussolini's Italy, Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union and half heartedly in Britain, under the National Government, state intervention and organisation of economy and society intensifies as does national autarky. With the exception of the Soviet Union, the conjoining of patriotism and consumerism were common features in these different political responses to the crisis. The 1980s by contrast marks a period in Britain of neo-liberal acceleration and the bonfires of state regulation. Consumerism and patriotism, desire and law, are once more articulated, this time by Thatcherism, but the links between the two are now even more contradictory. There is a growing awareness of how social and economic relations transcend the nation-state and as Thatcherism pushes consumerism and elected authoritarianism to new extremes, the polarities of desire and law intensify the contradictions of the moment.

The search for temporal continuity and geographical distinctiveness means that both periods are replete with desire for the past or terrains which connote 'pastness'. In the 1930s there is a revival of Tudor-ism in architecture (half timbering, galleon stained glass) and in the cinema. In 1930, the poet, dramatist and novelist John Masefield is made poet laureate, his work redolent with tales of merchant-adventuring and ancient empires. In the 1980s, heritage is reconstructed from disparate points in time: neo Georgian figures prominently as the preferred style of specialist building while Margaret Thatcher made the Victorian era a frequent cultural and political reference point. But from Prince Charles' rejection of modern architecture in favour of small scale 'villages' <sup>116</sup>, through to tourism and film, heritage has been a major theme. <sup>117</sup>

However, this cultural continuity belies an important difference with regard

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<sup>116</sup> J. Glancey, "Adrift in a modern age" the Guardian 2 21/1/98 pp.2-3

<sup>117</sup> Enterprise and Heritage : crosscurrents of national culture (eds) J. Corner and S. Harvey, London, Routledge, 1991.

to the ideologeme of the organic community. In the 1930s the organic community emerges to play an important role in providing the imagery for a cohesive social totality. It functioned then and for some decades after as semantic material that could underpin the national imaginary. The organic community does not disappear in the 1980s, but it haemorrhages support. For the New Right, economic “modernisation” comes into conflict with the organic community’s basically static self conception, while politically the New Right comes into conflict with the One Nation politics onto which the organic community had been grafted. On the left, the ideologeme had been grafted onto the industrial working class from the 1930s onwards (Mass Observation, the Left-Leavisism of a Richard Hoggart,<sup>118</sup> or early Raymond Williams). Indeed, Raymond Williams explicitly acknowledged the appeal and dangers of the organic community for socialists:

“It is perhaps true that the ideas of an “organic” society are an essential preparation for socialist theory, and for the more general attention to a “whole way of life”, in opposition to theories which consistently reduce social to individual questions, and which support legislation of an individualist as opposed to a collectivist kind. But the theories can hardly be abstracted from actual social situations, and the “organic” theory has in fact been used in support of very different, even opposing, causes.”<sup>119</sup>

It was precisely the racial, ethnic and gendered homogeneity of the working class which the ideologeme of the organic community preserved and from which the left substantially disassociated itself from in the 1980s.<sup>120</sup> Yet while it’s ideological power is fatally weakened, the ideologeme retains a strong appeal. While it is possible to find it still functioning as a resource for conceiving national identity in a film such as Chariots Of Fire (Hugh Hudson, 1981), it is figured more frequently as an isolated enclave, detached

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<sup>118</sup> R. Hoggart, The Uses Of Literacy Penguin Book/Chatto and Windus, Harmondsworth, 1957.

<sup>119</sup> R. Williams, Culture and Society 1880-1950, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1963, p.145.

<sup>120</sup> Hall and Gilroy have critiqued the unexamined racial assumptions underpinning Raymond Williams’ discussion of identity and community. Williams has suggested, using language still influenced by the organic community, that identity and community, is built up “through long experience” and “sustained social relationships.” As Hall and Gilroy note, this definition of community and identity (how long is “long experience”?) leaves the immigrant excluded, accepted only at a formal, legalistic level. See, P. Gilroy, There Ain’t No Black In The Union Jack Routledge, London, 1993, pp.49-51 and S. Hall, “Culture, Community, Nation” in Cultural Studies vol.7, no.3, October 1993.

from, indeed, holding out against, the modern world ( Local Hero, Funny Bones, Another Time, Another Place, Shirley Valentine). This contraction in its scope is linked to the different political and economic contexts of the two periods.

The changing fortunes of the organic community are also closely interwoven with shifts in gender. Male employment in traditional heavy industries was particularly badly hit by the 1929 crash on Wall Street, but this was a short term phenomenon and accompanied by still very modest concessions to improving the social position of women.<sup>121</sup> This contrasts with the systemic and long term changes in the labour market that characterises the post-1979 period. The growth of the service sector (traditionally female) and contraction of manufacturing (traditionally male) was coupled with the legacy of feminism which had helped make female equality, in theory at least, much more widely accepted.

The pluralisation of *communities* of interest, for example, sexuality, gender and ethnicity which undermined the homogeneity of organicist conceptions, also led to the claim, during the 1980s, that class interests and consciousness were now in decline as a pole of attraction and around which an oppositional politics could be forged. Certainly class has to vie with other social dynamics but the constellation between the two periods also shows, in this study at least, the persistence of the importance of class relations. In particular, both the 1930s and the 1980s are periods where the middle classes make their choices about where they align themselves in the battle between capital and labour. This issue emerges in different ways in films like Aliens, Robo Cop Total Recall, Local Hero and The Name Of The Rose. The ur-image here is of course, via Benjamin, Baudelaire's *flaneur*, who mixes with the masses but is not of them.<sup>122</sup> Benjamin also focused on the question of the middle class, particularly the producers of culture and information, in his essay, "The Author As Producer". While Brecht assumed that the proletarianisation of the intellectual in the 1930s made their interests identical to the working class, Benjamin suggested a more subtle dialectic of unity and difference.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> S. Rowbotham, A Century Of Women: The History Of Women In Britain And The United States Viking, London, 1997, p.146.

<sup>122</sup> W. Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire op.cit., pp.58-59 and p.170.

<sup>123</sup> E. Lunn, Marxism & Modernism; op.cit., pp.277-278.

“The solidarity of the expert with the proletariat...can never be other than mediated...Even the proletarianization of the intellectual hardly ever makes him a proletarian. Why? Because the bourgeois class has endowed him with a means of production -in the form of his education- which, on the grounds of educational privilege, creates a bond of solidarity which attaches him to his class, and still more attaches his class to him.” <sup>124</sup>

In some ways then, we can follow Thomas Elsaesser's approach, and see the film text as an allegorical working through of the contradictory class position of the cultural producers involved. <sup>125</sup>

Similarly, we can read cultural theory as a working through of the critic's relationship with what used to be called, “the masses”. The New Right claimed the 1980s as an era of consumer power and sovereignty, a discourse mirrored by those on the left who theorised a paradigmatic shift towards ‘flexible accumulation’ and ‘post-fordism’ while often uncritically celebrating the power of fantasy and desire by equating it with transgression. In contrast to the 1980s where critics often learned to fall in love with the popular, in the 1930s, both anti-mass culture positions and those working for a “quality” popular cinema did so in Britain *within* a broadly Leavisite paradigm that sought to *reform* (rather than just accept) the popular. There is though something of a parallel between this spectrum of critical engagements with popular culture in the 1930s and the 1980s. In the latter period we have the neo-Frankfurtian School critique of narcissism, consumerism and integration into multinational capitalism, or, sliding along the scale, those engagements with mass culture that seek out its oppositional possibilities without collapsing into an uncritical celebration of pleasure, fantasy and desire. This thesis will rotate through or constellate these different positions, assessing their strengths and weaknesses, but if its heart belongs anywhere, it is with a critical, historically grounded engagement with the popular.

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<sup>124</sup> W. Benjamin, Understanding Brecht, New Left Books, London, 1973, p.145.

<sup>125</sup> See for example T. Elsaesser, “Social Mobility and the Fantastic: German Silent Cinema” in Fantasy and the Cinema (ed) J. Donald, BFI, London, 1989.

## **Part One: Spectatorship**



**British Film Culture  
And Spectatorship  
In The 1930s**

"The characteristic attitude of British or other governments towards the economy before the Industrial Revolution was that they had a duty to do something about it. This is also the almost universal attitude of governments towards the economy today. But between these two eras, which represent what might be called the norm of history, and indeed of reason, there occurred an age in which the fundamental attitude of the government and the economists was the opposite: the less it could manage to intervene in the economy, the better." E. J. Hobsbawm, 1968 <sup>1</sup>

"[The historical researcher must] give up the tranquil, contemplative attitude toward the object in order to become conscious of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past is positioned with regard to precisely this present." Walter Benjamin <sup>2</sup>

The quote from Walter Benjamin reminds us to approach a historical film which itself has past into history in terms of a double temporal constellation: between the present and the early 1930s and between the early 1930s and the more distant, pre-industrial, Tudor past conjured up in Alexander Korda's The Private Life Of Henry VIII (1933). After Thatcherism, globalisation, privatisation and deregulation, we know today that what Hobsbawm could take as the "norm of history, and indeed of reason" may indeed have been only one phase in what Jeremy Seabrook, in another context, described as "the epic circularity of capitalism." <sup>3</sup> Certainly in the post-1979 period, the non-interventionist state, operating as a facilitator of a largely self regulating economy instituted itself as the new age of reason, the new norm of history, the new modernisation programme. Yet the past reminds us that this new age of reason is not new and that *its* norms passed into obsolescence once before. ... Henry VIII (as I shall refer to the film hereafter) emerges at precisely that historical moment when Hobsbawm's age of reason (in effect, monopoly capitalism) was finally supplanting the principles of *laissez-faire*. Difficult as it may be for us to imagine now, some kind of "break with the past, the major operation", as the poet C. Day Lewis put it, <sup>4</sup> seemed imminent and inevitable to many people, even stalwart defenders of capitalism. The film articulates something of this potential rupture, even as it also tries to establish an organic line of continuity with the past.

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<sup>1</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire An economic history of Britain since 1750 Penguin/Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1968, p.190.

<sup>2</sup> W. Benjamin, quoted in S. Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project MIT Press, Massachusetts, 1989, pp.289-290.

<sup>3</sup> J. Seabrook, The Guardian, September 15th, 1997, p.19.

<sup>4</sup> C. Day Lewis, The Magnetic Mountain 1933, quoted in J. Symons, The Thirties: A Dream Revolved Faber and Faber, London, 1975, p.24.

The early 1930s sees the rise of the modern British film industry; sound cinema, established by Hollywood in the late 1920s,<sup>5</sup> was becoming institutionalised the world over. This is the period when the first substantive state intervention into the industry in 1927 was to have its effects, when the industrial structure, critical concerns and aesthetic traditions that were to dominate British films subsequently, come decisively into play.<sup>6</sup> ...Henry VIII lies at the intersection of three genres that were very important in the 1930s (and beyond): historical films, comedies and melodramas. It also lies at the intersection of three geo-cultural resources. It has a British investment in the ideologeme of the organic community, thus constructing an endogenous national identity. The ideologeme has a history which predates its mobilisation in film culture. I will reconstruct that history up to and including its manifestation in F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson's 1933 book, Culture and Environment. Following my discussion of the ideologeme in the introduction, we shall find that the organic community is ambivalently poised between a reconciliation of subject and object, reason and desire, or a stratified, constraining social order (O.C.1 and O.C.2).

...Henry VIII also exhibits aspirations to make a Hollywood style epic (it sought to 'crack' the American market) with a vernacular mode of address (Alexander Korda had worked in Hollywood during the late 1920s). This too has ambivalent implications since Hollywood's vernacular address is also hegemonic. The film is simultaneously interlaced with European, perhaps even Modernist aesthetics. Again perhaps this is not surprising given that key creative personnel working on the film had come from the European mainland where Modernism had flourished, due largely to the sharp socio-economic "juxtapositions" of combined and uneven development.<sup>7</sup> Korda and his brother Vincent, the film's set designer, came from Hungary, as did the co-scriptwriter, Lajos Biro. The cameraman meanwhile was Georges Périnal, who had worked with such modernist luminaries as Jean Epstein, Jean Cocteau and René Clair. British (film) culture then is not hermetically sealed off from other geo-cultural influences.

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<sup>5</sup> R. C. Allen and D. Gomery, Film History, Theory and Practice, McGraw-Hill, New York, pp.115-123.

<sup>6</sup> A. Higson, Waving The Flag: constructing a national cinema in Britain Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> P. Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution" in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture (eds) C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, Macmillan, London, 1988.

In terms of spectatorship, each of these cultural resources have ambivalent potentialities, as we shall see. A recurrent theme for example in studies of British cinema has been the question of evaluating its 'Britishness'; whether for example, in comparison to Hollywood, it stands condemned as being a class bound film culture, desperately out of touch with popular tastes, or whether its 'difference' from Hollywood can be read more positively as offering an alternative to the Hollywood mode of identification. Against classical Hollywood's unswerving attempts to align the spectator to the heroic character(s) of the film, perhaps British cinema offers a more sceptical, critical, ironic mode of identification where fallibility is writ large and mock-heroic figures provide our key points of narrative focalisation. But if this is so it is only achieved at the expense of embedding characters in the inertia of social traditions, curtailing individualism but curtailing too the popular, utopian thrust towards the promises of modernity and the possibility of change or alternatively accepting change but equating it with decline. Thus the question of travel in relation to spectatorship is a question of what semantic territory the spectator can cross into. How far can the spectator travel into cultural meanings and values that conflict with dominant cultural formations? Pam Cook has eloquently put the metaphor of travel to use in regard to watching films:

"As [cinematic] travellers, we cross boundaries and, through identification with other cultures, acquire a sense of ourselves as something more than national subjects...The loss of self involved in identification with characters or immersion in narrative processes can be seen as a kind of travelling in which the wanderer can return 'home' with a different perspective." <sup>8</sup>

### **Philosophies Of History**

Since the film deals with history, it is worth asking what kinds of philosophies of history were at play in the 1930s that we may draw on to understand the film. I want to identify three. They are: history as heritage, history as a positivistic set of facts, and history as constellation. We can locate history as heritage in the discourse of the novelist Philip Lindsay, who acted as a historical advisor on ...Henry VIII. Implicitly lambasting Hollywood cinema, with its portrayal (in the gangster genre) of the "vulgar

<sup>8</sup> P. Cook, Fashioning the Nation, Costume and Identity in British Cinema BFI, London, 1996, p.4.

and brutal things of today” he looked forward to the resurgence of historical films.

“In future, however, we shall be shown the great achievements of man in the past; we will see heroic deeds and splendid women, and thus be taught that our civilisation is not a crude, sudden growth - not a ‘system’, as the communists, in defiance of history, will call it - but that down the centuries man has been striving forward, building, creating...That is what costume films can make us realize.” <sup>9</sup>

Few statements could demonstrate the contradictions of capitalist modernity more than this one. For it is of course, not the communists who have invented the ruptures of modernity (what Lindsay refers to as its “sudden growth”) or its systemic qualities, evident in the assorted works of F.W. Taylor, Henry Ford and Ferdinand Saussure, but capitalism itself, which requires in turn some sort of compensating invocation of an organic continuity.

Against this openly political conception we can counterpoint the response to the film by one C. R. Beard writing in Sight and Sound. It is significant that a film magazine gives space to, not a film critic, but a historian and archaeologist who ticks the film off for its inaccuracies. <sup>10</sup> He declares that the film displays “a lamentable lack of knowledge of the manners, customs and practices of the court.” <sup>11</sup> He criticises the hair styles of the characters, the costume, weaponry and furniture as a “hotch-pot of all periods” <sup>12</sup> And against the claims of other critics at the time who praised the film for its authentic portrait of Henry’s vulgarity, <sup>13</sup> Beard argues that “[t]udor table manners were excellent. The nice management of knife and fingers is carefully set forth in *The Babees Book* and all who were well born understood the art.” <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> P. Lindsay, ‘The Camera Turns on History’ Cinema Quarterly Autumn 1933, pp.10-11.

<sup>10</sup> S. Harper has mapped the extensive debate in film journals, magazines and amongst historians concerning the relations between history and popular film that was to unfold in the decade after The Private Life of Henry VIII. See Picturing The Past, The Rise and Fall Of The British Costume Film, BFI, London, 1994, pp.56-76.

<sup>11</sup> Sight and Sound, Winter 1934, p.124, under the wonderful title of ‘Why Get it Wrong?’

<sup>12</sup> Sight and Sound, ibid, p.125.

<sup>13</sup> For example, F. Hardy (later Grierson’s biographer), in Cinema Quarterly Autumn, 1933, pp.39-40

<sup>14</sup> Sight and Sound, op.cit.

Beard's positivistic fetishisation of the 'facts' is obviously a complete dead end for film criticism and aesthetics, but it is no more than a logical and rigorous application of the empirical realism which underpins so many critical discourses. At the same time, the impasse of this naive realism raises the question of how we can adequately formulate the relationship between the historical film and history. Beard's solution, to measure the film against an existing standard of historical knowledge is a typical one,<sup>15</sup> but fails to ask the question important to ideology critique: how have the 'facts' in the historical film and in historiography generally, been selected, framed and interpreted and what is the relationship between *this* process and the historical 'moment' of interpretation *and* the a-symmetrical relations of power at work within this moment? By asking such questions the historical film may tell us as much about the period in which it was made as the period depicted and indeed, in the case of ...Henry VIII, it seems sensible to take this as our main focus of study, without losing sight of the significance that Henry VIII, rather than say, a C16th pirate, has been selected for (re)signification.

Against Lindsay's notion of heritage and Beard's positivism we can counterpoise Walter Benjamin's notion of the constellation. Benjamin was one of the first critics to identify the intermingling of the new and the old in modernity and link this dynamic back to the mode of production. The images and representations generated in the "collective unconscious" seek to transcend "the deficiencies of the social order of production."<sup>16</sup> However, the process of perpetual rupture (what Marx described, in The Communist Manifesto as the process whereby all that is solid melts into air) means that modernism explodes the foundations of the *immediate* past (variably constructed), making it unusable and indeed unwanted. As Benjamin puts it: "there also emerges in these wish images a positive striving to set themselves off from the outdated - that means, however, the most recent past."<sup>17</sup> Mobilising that period of mercantile capitalism that existed prior to the Industrial Revolution and *laissez-faire* government, the film articulates precisely the utopian "striving" Benjamin refers to. At the same time, it remains snared within the social fetters which underpin the

<sup>15</sup> R. Burgoyne, Bertolucci's 1900 Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1991, p.8.

<sup>16</sup> W. Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet In The Age Of High Capitalism New Left Books, London, 1973, p.159.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in S. Buck-Morss, *op.cit.*, p.114.

moment of enunciation.

### **Text and Historical Context**

What then is the film's historical moment of enunciation? I want here to briefly sketch the political and economic context of the early 1930s and, anticipating my later discussion of ...Henry VIII, suggest how that context intersects with the politics of the text. To understand the nature of that intersection, it is important to bear in mind that this was a peculiar period of stability *and* crisis, continuity *and* change, conservative and Conservative hegemony on the one hand and a not inconsiderable political radicalisation on the other.

The concentration of ownership and economic power in fewer hands, which had been accumulating internationally for at least fifty years, had made the actions and interests of ever smaller numbers of people acquire serious ramifications for an ever greater number of people. Largely in response to working class struggle in a number of industries against precisely those unchecked ramifications, the British state began to increasingly involve itself in the co ordination of business during the 1920s. The solution to economic instability was, paradoxically, to encourage greater monopolisation, thus it was hoped, to diminish competitive ruptures within the system. The railways were amalgamated in 1921, the electricity supply concentrated and partially nationalised in 1926, radio broadcasting was set up as a public monopoly in the same year, a monopolisation of iron and steel was state sponsored (1932), a national coal cartel was organised in 1936,<sup>18</sup> while the 1927 Cinematograph Act was to encourage the growth of two vertically integrated film companies in the 1930s, ABPC and Gaumont-British.<sup>19</sup> It was clear to a minority that change was coming. Even before John Maynard Keynes' General Theory (1936) there was, according to Skidelsky, a minority but growing cross party support for an expansionist monetary policy and a programme of government investment as early as the late 1920s.<sup>20</sup> These were to be the dog days of *laissez-faire* capitalism, as political changes in America and Europe testified.

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<sup>18</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *op.cit.*, p.205.

<sup>19</sup> M. Chanan, "The Emergence of an Industry" in British Cinema History (eds) J. Curran and V. Porter, Barnes and Noble Books, New Jersey, 1983, p.57.

<sup>20</sup> R. Skidelsky, Politicians and the Slump, the Labour Government of 1929-1931. Paper Mac, London, 1994, pp.xi-xii.

The Labour government had been elected on a platform of change to deal with unemployment which had been running at 10% of the working population through out the 1920s.<sup>21</sup> Not for the last time, Labour proved quite unable to escape the economic orthodoxy of the moment. As Malcom Muggeridge put it, "...[Labour] had inveighed against capitalism, and now found themselves its legatees, like prohibitionists unexpectedly made responsible for the management of a derilict brewery."<sup>22</sup>

The "brewery" became even more derelict after the effects of the Wall Street Crash began to ripple out across Europe. Unemployment rose steadily peaking at three million in 1933.<sup>23</sup> In 1931, the Macdonald Labour government, unable to raise the finances to fund unemployment benefits, had been replaced by the National Government, led by Macdonald and Baldwin, the Conservative Party leader. The Conservative dominated National Government was to be in power for the rest of the decade. While the political complexion of the National Government accurately registered the dominating forces of inertia and tradition in Britain, new political forces were stirring abroad which connected with minority currents inside Britain. The Communist leadership in the Soviet Union and the Fascist leaderships that had emerged in Italy and Germany, posed very acutely, the prospect of a new kind of domination and power structure.

Auden's The Orators, published in 1932 addresses itself to the question and problem of leadership. According to Hynes, the poem "records that stage in Auden's and England's history when the course was uncertain and the leaders absent."<sup>24</sup> Symons, a contemporary of Auden, recalls that Auden's poem was received with some ambivalence; its imagery and values straddling uneasily between calls for social justice that only a post-capitalist/socialist society could offer, but also tinged - particularly around the figure of the Airman, with a certain Fascist resonance.<sup>25</sup> Part of the ambiguity resides in the fact that both Soviet communism and Fascism were perceived as

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<sup>21</sup> R. Skidelsky, *ibid*, p.1.

<sup>22</sup> M. Muggeridge, The Thirties Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1989, p.101.

<sup>23</sup> A. F. Havighurst, Britain in Transition: The Twentieth Century University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1979, p. 238.

<sup>24</sup> S. Hynes, The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s Bodley Head, London, 1976, p.94.

<sup>25</sup> J. Symons, The Thirties *op.cit.*, p.30.



modern. Mosley for example, just before establishing the British Union of Fascists, wrote of the need for a “movement which cuts like a sword through the knot of the past to the meaning of the modern State.”<sup>26</sup>

In this context, ...Henry VIII’s mobilisation of the past is a curious mix of criticism of and accommodation with the present social order. To take the latter first, it can be seen as affirming British difference from Europe by trading on a historical figure associated with defying its religious norms. The film offers a rather reassuring image of leadership which, at least initially, and on the surface, appears to be both effective and traditional. It offers an image of a leader in the context of a hierarchical, class divided society, who is also able to connect with his subjects. The image of Henry VIII offers, in the context of other foreign models of relations between leaders and led, a distinctly English image of power and rule. Yet even this image of leadership is treated with some ambivalence given the film’s irreverent tone and narrative of decline. However, we should be cautious about seeing either the tone or the narrative as necessarily undermining the conservative and consolatory structure of feeling that I have located the film in. After all, in 1931 audiences were invited to sing ‘God Save The King’ after performances of Noel Coward’s popular musical, Cavalcade, even though it traced the decline of the British Empire. As Hynes remarks, this combination of despair and tradition is only the “musical equivalent of just what happened in the October election: at a time of extreme National crisis a business-as-usual government had been returned to office.”<sup>27</sup>

This combination of crisis and patriotism is evident in the revival of cultural nationalism in British painting as one response to Sterling being forced off the Gold Standard in 1931. In 1932, although there were still Free Traders within the cabinet of the National Government, a policy of tariffs on imports and preference for imperial goods, was implemented.<sup>28</sup> Thus proclamations that painters should study British people and British landscapes had their counterpart in the massive ‘Buy British’ campaign.<sup>29</sup> While the link between economic protectionism and cultural nationalism

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<sup>26</sup> J. Symons, *ibid*, p.19.

<sup>27</sup> S. Hynes, The Auden Generation *op. cit.* p.66.

<sup>28</sup> A. F. Havighurst, *op.cit.*, pp.235-236.

<sup>29</sup> D. Mellor, “British Art in the 1930s: Some Economic, Political and Cultural Structures” in Class, Culture, Social Change. A New View of the 1930s. (ed) Frank Gloversmith Harvester Press, Sussex, 1980, pp.186-187.

was framed by the racist politics of Fascism in Germany and Italy, a more complex ideological situation pertained in Britain. For contained within this apparently parochial and insular cultural response were the seeds, as Mellor notes, of the humanitarian naturalism that was to emerge in British cinema and *Mass Observation*. This duality is also evident in *...Henry VIII* insofar as it revives not only an iconic figure of the national/English past, but also depicts a social totality, complete with 'ordinary' people.

Both the film and the wider context are indeed a more contradictory field than the results of the 1931 Elections suggest. In the 1930s sections of the intelligentsia were moving to the left (Hugh Gordon Porteus suggested in 1933 "Verse will be worn longer this year, and rather Red")<sup>30</sup> and even those who rejected socialism, as F.R. Leavis did, "articulated a sense of the crisis of capitalism as deep and sincerely held as any Marxist's."<sup>31</sup> Jack Klugman, still in his early twenties at the time, detected "a dawning challenge to accepted sex morality, a challenge to widely taught standards of behaviour, and a broad challenge to the religious outlook."<sup>32</sup> Symons too recalls that pushing at the boundaries of sexual morality was a kind of metaphorical act in which social norms were defied. "Every illicit sexual act seemed a blow struck in aid of an ideal theoretical freedom."<sup>33</sup>

Bracketing for the moment the gender implications of filtering the politics of sexuality through Henry VIII, the ur-patriarch of popular culture, I want to just focus on the film's mobilisation of the sexual conduct and mores of the aristocracy as a class. While the early C16th aristocracy were polygamous in practice if not officially, the widespread image of the aristocracy as promiscuous was only really forged under James I as court decadence clashed with the growing influence of puritanism.<sup>34</sup> A series of public scandals in the 1610s meant that sexual promiscuity became ineradicably linked to the aristocracy and the court.<sup>35</sup> This functioned to delegitimise the aristocracy further in the eyes of an emerging class constituted by a very

<sup>30</sup> J. Symons, *The Thirties* op. cit., p.23.

<sup>31</sup> I. Wright "F.R. Leavis, *The Scrutiny* Movement and the Crisis" in J. Clark, M. Heinerman, D. Margolis and C. Snee, *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the 30s* Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1979, p.39-40.

<sup>32</sup> J. Klugman, "The Crisis of the Thirties: A view from the Left" in J. Clark et al, *Culture and Crisis* ibid, p.16.

<sup>33</sup> J. Symons, *The Thirties* op.cit., p.41.

<sup>34</sup> L. Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* OUP, London, 1980, p.301.

<sup>35</sup> L. Stone, ibid, p.301.

different moral, sexual and wealth generating economy. However, the appropriation of this link between the aristocracy and sexual license by Korda's film redirects and reworks its ideological meaning for a mass working class audience. Now it becomes a means of registering dissent from bourgeois sexual norms.

The organic community is an unstable representation. If on the one hand it can be mobilised to depict a hierarchical, constraining, stratified social order, it can also signify a return to a more 'natural' (sexual) expressiveness and indeed Henry's excessive appetite (for all things) makes him something of a Rabelaisian figure.<sup>36</sup> British cinema is well known and often criticised for its narratives that are ambivalently poised between being *about* repression and actually exhibiting symptoms of repression. Such narratives are dominated by the middle class. So Henry is a curious anomaly insofar as he comes from the dominant class while also signifying the kind of irrepressible sexuality, which, when it does appear in British cinema, is located with the working class. The raw material for this ambiguous class identity is distinctly British or European. Adorno commented on this relationship between the aristocracy and the working class from his American exile. Even where "bourgeois utility overcame" pre-capitalist formations, he notes,

"the doubt nevertheless remained whether man was made merely to exchange. The remnants of the old were, in the European consciousness, ferments of the new."<sup>37</sup>

This old/new dialectic constructs a Benjaminian constellation. It should be noted how ambivalently the film is poised between a *constellation*, which understood from a Benjaminian perspective, does not seek to return to the past but to *redeem* its incompleteness, and a cross-class alliance between the old and the new. In the film this cross-class alliance is embodied in Henry himself. If the raw material which the film is working with is distinctly British or European, the *cinematic* condensation of different class identities in a single figure, facilitating as it does a vernacular mode of address, seems to owe more to the characterology of Hollywood cinema and American popular culture generally. By contrast, in British cinema, classes

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<sup>36</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination University of Texas Press, Austin, 1992, pp.167-206.

<sup>37</sup> T.W. Adorno, Minima Moralia, New Left Books, London, 1974, pp.195-196.

are clearly demarcated and separated and any sense of class confusion or class mobility is generally expunged. Webster has suggested that where European identity is constructed around a notion of fixed borders, American social identity is constructed around a moving frontier.<sup>38</sup>

Yet if Henry has some of the qualities of the hero typical of Hollywood cinema, he lacks the narrative framework which would allow him to realise his desires. Thomas Elsaesser has provided one of the most acute and succinct summaries of the narrative dynamics of the Hollywood film:

“There is a central energy at the heart of any good Hollywood film which seeks to live itself out as completely as possible. The prevailing plot-mechanisms invariably conform to the same basic pattern. There is always a central dynamic drive, always the same graph of maximum energetic investment...a fundamentally affirmative attitude, a kind of *a priori* optimism located in the very structure of the narrative about the usefulness of positive action.”<sup>39</sup>

Henry however is stuck in a very different kind of narrative structure, one which, as we shall see, has a distinctively British investment in the past and in the organic community. If Henry's sexual expressiveness, his sexual desire represents one 'face' of the organic community (being in touch with nature/one's own nature) this expressivity also comes into conflict with the other 'face' of the organic community: the organic community as a hierarchical, enclosed and static order. If Henry licenses desire and is himself intensely desiring, he is also the agent of the Law, of social control and as such he represents the social fetters of the ideologeme of the organic community, its class and gendered relations, its freezing of desire and curtailment of fantasy. For the film begins with an act of patriarchal power: Anne Boleyn's execution on the charge of adultery, and it will end with another female death for the same reason. Thus Henry both licenses the pleasure principle and is the conduit for the performance principle.

The inter and intra class tensions which this suppression of desire provokes, is contradictorily combined with a complex gender politics in a film whose

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<sup>38</sup> D. Webster, Looka Yonder, The Imaginary America Of Populist Culture Comedia/Routledge, London, 1988, p.25. We may add that within the European imaginary, it is in the Imperial domains that borders of various sorts may be more readily crossed. See for example, the Korda brothers' The Four Feathers (Zoltan Korda, 1939).

<sup>39</sup> T. Elsaesser, "The pathos of failure: American films in the 1970s" Monogram, no.6, 1975, p.14.

central protagonist is a kind of ur-patriarch in popular culture. Through out the 1920s, changes in women's public behaviour, in fashion and the emergent mass market for leisure items, swam in the same egalitarian stream which was to lead to the vote being extended to all women in the late 1920s. <sup>40</sup> Rowbotham identifies the changes in fashion during the 1920s, noting how hair and hemlines became shorter and that clothes "became much lighter and it was easier to move. In 1925 they weighed one-tenth as much as in the mid-Victorian period." <sup>41</sup> The growth in the cosmetic industry, as with other industries, <sup>42</sup> can be linked to the now consolidated mass medium of film. As Rowbotham argues,

"The beauty-makers, often women, were evangelical. Every woman, no matter how plain, could emulate the heroines of the screen. The image of femininity was projected back to millions of women, and served the interests of capital well. Not only were profits made directly in the film and cosmetics industry, but glamour became accessible on the market, disguising the economic and sexual misery which lurked behind the millions spent and the weariness and frustration which continued in the real world outside the picture palace." <sup>43</sup>

This assessment of mass culture, consumerism and fantasy is fairly typical of Marxist attitudes to the popular and is problematic insofar as it downplays its contradictory dynamics. <sup>44</sup> What I want to suggest is a slightly more contradictory scenario both in terms of how we read consumption and in terms of the wider historical situation. For the discrepancy between the promises of an emerging consumer capitalism and other areas of life (in civil society, in the domestic sphere, at work) does not just function as a kind of disguise, although at one level it obviously may do just that. Conversely, fantasy and desire have become key notions within film studies during the 1980s, sometimes at the expense of ideology-critique

<sup>40</sup> N. Branson, Britain in the Nineteen Twenties Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1975, p.209.

<sup>41</sup> S. Rowbotham, Hidden From History, 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It Pluto Press, London, 1977, p.125.

<sup>42</sup> T.H. Guback, "Hollywood's Foreign Markets" in The American Film Industry (ed) Tino Balio, University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, 1985, p.466.

<sup>43</sup> S. Rowbotham, op.cit.

<sup>44</sup> P. Cook, Fashioning the Nation op.cit., pp.46-47, discusses Charles Eckert's analysis of Hollywood's consumer tie-ins during the 1920s and 1930s.

altogether. It is possible however to engage with the potentially subversive/transgressive possibilities of fantasy and consumerism, without jettisoning a critical perspective altogether. If we take seriously the Marxist analysis of the commodity form and the contradiction between and within production and consumption which lies at the heart of that socio-economic analysis, then we must also see, at a cultural level, the promises of consumption coming into friction with certain existing conditions. I shall argue that in order to discuss female spectatorship in relation to ...Henry VIII, the positioning of women as consumers, may exacerbate (and not just reinforce) their position of subordination within the social order.

As for the historical scenario, the weight of tradition still predominated in the realm of work. Between 1921-31 only 10% of married women went out to work,<sup>45</sup> while the range of occupations open to women remained largely confined to domestic services and increasingly clerical work.<sup>46</sup> Yet if the home and the family remained dominant spheres for women, there were changes going on which reflected the increasing power of women to make choices within that sphere. For example, the campaign for birth control clinics, Marie Stopes' publications on sex education and the decreasing average number of children which couples had, all pointed towards shifts in the status and role of women in society.<sup>47</sup> As with the sphere of class struggles, gender struggles in the early 1930s exhibited this tension between continuity and change. The main fulcrums supporting traditional male power were still very much in place but nevertheless, the preceding two decades had seen a number of shifts and challenges to male power.

### **Genealogy of an Ideologeme**

An ideologeme or belief system may manifest itself primarily as either a concept or doctrine (in a work of sociology for example) or as a narrative (in a fictional text). While it is likely to be weighted more towards one or other of these poles, there is always an element of *both* components at work since narratives cannot work without underlying abstractions while even the most conceptual work usually tells some sort of story.<sup>48</sup> The ideologeme that I

<sup>45</sup> N. Branson, Britain... op.cit., p.213.

<sup>46</sup> N. Branson, *ibid*, p.212 and 218.

<sup>47</sup> N. Branson, *ibid*, pp.214-217.

<sup>48</sup> F. Jameson, The Political Unconscious, Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act Routledge, London, 1989, p.87.

am concerned with is the organic community. The relationship between the ideologue and its manifestation in particular texts bears a passing resemblance to Saussure's notion of *langue* and *parole*. Except that for Saussure, the synchronic study of *langue*, the system of rules which govern a language, gave the concept an a-temporal, a-historical quality whereas I want to embed the ideologue in the fluctuations of historical change. This means that in studying a text our concern cannot be to trace its workings back to an unchanging semantic system, as Saussure and subsequently structuralism would have it. <sup>49</sup>

My approach is to explore the dynamic relationship between a historically conditioned semantic resource (the ideologue) and its specific reworking in concrete texts which thus feeds back into (and so changes) the semantic resource. This is in line with Saussure's near contemporary and critic Volosinov (probably Bakhtin's pseudonym) whose linguistic theories started with the (re)working of signs by interlocutors in specific exchanges marked by time and place. Against Saussure, Volosinov insisted on the referential services the sign is pressed into, which is not to say that signs merely reflect the world, rather, their referentiality is a site of contestation, the site of "intersecting...differently oriented social interests." <sup>50</sup>

The genealogy of the organic community is essentially the story of an ideologue founded within one social order (feudalism) existing precariously in the overlaps between that social order and the newly emergent one of mercantile capitalism before its old material conditions of existence are dismantled as capitalism matures into *laissez-faire*. However, the ideologue does not wither away, rather its social anchorage, like other traditions, is remoored. <sup>51</sup> Thus an ideologue that started life in connection with particular class strata under feudalism (craftsmen, peasants, aristocracy) becomes under capitalism remoored by that section of the middle classes located in the apparatuses of cultural production and education, as an important component in the construction of a national identity.

During the nineteenth century the residual remains of mercantile

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<sup>49</sup> B. D. Palmer, Descent Into Discourse, The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1990, pp.8-9.

<sup>50</sup> V.N. Volosinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1973, p.23.

<sup>51</sup> J. B. Thompson, The Media and Modernity Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, p.197.

capitalism by which wealth was accumulated through state power, was dismantled.<sup>52</sup> Mercantile capitalism's relationship with the state had prolonged the feudal ideology "which assumed that government had a duty to maintain a stable society in which every man had the right to live in the (generally low) station to which the Almighty had called him.." <sup>53</sup> This social code had been established in the Tudor era, but by the 1800s it was largely obsolete. The legal fixing of prices or wages or the legal control of other conditions of labour had been steadily undermined. A body of case-law against contracts that restricted trade was developed by the courts, <sup>54</sup> reflecting the wider shift in the transformation of labour into a commodity.<sup>55</sup> The state was paradoxically extremely active (as indeed it has been in the post-1979 period) in securing the legal and coercive conditions for *laissez-faire*. <sup>56</sup>

Yet even though its feudal conditions of existence had disappeared, the ideologeme was to provide a resource for criticism of *laissez-faire* and the Industrial Revolution by such middle class dissidents as Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin and William Morris, before the latter's conversion to Marxism. <sup>57</sup> These figures were romantic anti-capitalists, in Lukacs' formulation, <sup>58</sup> 'conservative radicals' or nostalgic anti-capitalists, in Turner's classification. <sup>59</sup> Crucially, this tradition feeds into the expansion of education and cultural production in the twentieth century, via Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis. The remooring of the ideologeme as a way of figuring an alternative national identity based on use value rather than the now dominant exchange value, is graphically evident in this passage from Ruskin, published in 1862:

"Political economy (the economy of a State, or of citizens) consists simply in the production, preservation, and distribution, at fittest

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<sup>52</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, op.cit., p.192.

<sup>53</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, ibid, p.192.

<sup>54</sup> W. Keegan, The Spectre Of Capitalism Vintage, London,1993, p.40.

<sup>55</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, op.cit., pp.192-3.

<sup>56</sup> M. Barratt Brown, "Away With All the Great Arches: Anderson's History of British Capitalism" in New Left Review 167, Jan/Feb, 1988 , p.35.

<sup>57</sup> E.P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic To Revolutionary Pantheon Books, New York,1976, pp.27-39.

<sup>58</sup> G. Lukacs, The Historical Novel Merlin Press, London, 1989, p.26.

<sup>59</sup> B. S. Turner, "Ideology and Utopia in the Formation of an Intelligentsia: Reflections on the English Cultural Conduit" in Cultural Theory and Cultural Change SAGE/TCS, London,1992, pp.189-191.



time and place, of useful or pleasurable things. The farmer who cuts his hay at the right time; the shipwright who drives his bolts well home in sound wood; the builder who lays good bricks in well-tempered mortar; the housewife who takes care of her furniture in the parlour...and the singer who rightly disciplines, and never overstrains her voice, are all political economists in the true and final sense: adding continually to the riches and well-being of the nation to which they belong.”<sup>60</sup>

Ruskin offers this Political Economy as an alternative to a commodity economy governed by “commercial power over labour” which is premised on and which reproduces inequality amongst men and women. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of this intellectual tradition which offers a critique of capitalism while setting its face against socialism. This tradition runs all the way through to the late twentieth century. It is evident for example in Will Hutton’s critique of unregulated capitalism in the post 1979 period, with his exhortations for business to invest in the human capital of its workforce.<sup>61</sup> Thus Ruskin too rails against the crushing of the individual spirit by industrial standardisation and the division of labour, which he renames the division of men “broken into small fragments and crumbs of life.”<sup>62</sup>

Where once knowledge, intelligence and education was the ‘natural’ condition of the artisan’s life, industrial manufacturing has impoverished skilled labour and the mind of labour. Hence the need to establish formal education. There is no question that this was conceived as a hegemonic project. An older (feudal) vision which conflates culture with a natural social order and which bonds the high and the low, was to be mobilised on behalf of the new divisive social order of capitalism. The ideologeme of the organic community helped provide an ordering principle to contain the disruptive self interests unleashed by capitalism, “our strong individualism” which Arnold attacks in Culture and Anarchy.<sup>63</sup> Education for the purposes of revolt was the last thing on the minds of Ruskin, Arnold and

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<sup>60</sup> J. Ruskin, “True and False Economy” in Industrialisation and Culture 1830-1914 (eds) C. Harvie. G. Martin, A. Scharf, Macmillan/ Open University Press, London and Basingstoke, 1970, p.189.

<sup>61</sup> W. Hutton, The State We’re In Jonathan Cape, London, 1995, p.254.

<sup>62</sup> J. Ruskin, “The Nature of Gothic” in Industrialisation and Culture op.cit., p.307.

<sup>63</sup> M. Arnold, Culture and Anarchy (ed) J. Dover Wilson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971, p.49.

Leavis. Ruskin asked:

“[w]hich had, in reality, most of the serf nature in him, - the Irish peasant who was lying in wait yesterday for his landlord, with his musket muzzle thrust through the ragged hedge; or that old mountain servant, who 200 years ago...gave up his own life and the lives of his seven sons for his chief?” <sup>64</sup>

However, at the height of *laissez-faire*, progress was slow, the state only assuming direct responsibility for education in 1870. W.E. Forster's introduction to his Education Bill in 1870 identified the key events which made state provision in this area ineluctable. The extension of the electoral franchise (itself the product of working class agitation), the increasing evidence of economic competition from abroad and the prospect of military conflict using ill educated men, all helped concentrate the MPs minds.<sup>65</sup> It was left to Forster's brother-in-law, Matthew Arnold to make the more inaffable, cultural case for national greatness. Industrial productivity such as the coal industry he suggested, “did not excite love, interest, and admiration.” If England were to disappear tomorrow, would future generations admire “the England of the last twenty years, or the England of Elizabeth, of a time of spiritual effort?” <sup>66</sup> The historical reference point back to a pre-industrial medieval past is of course typical of the ideologeme of the organic community. If the advocates of culture at this time were still marginalised, liable to be seen “as elegant or spurious Jeremiahs” according to Arnold, <sup>67</sup> the quest for harmony and order, which Arnold found in and through culture, was exercising the middle classes by the late 1920s with the end of *laissez-faire*, the rise of monopoly capitalism and economic crisis.

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<sup>64</sup> J. Ruskin, “The Nature of Gothic” , op.cit.,p.307.

<sup>65</sup> W. E. Forster, “Introduction of the Education Bill” in Industrialisation and Culture op.cit., pp.142-143

<sup>66</sup> M. Arnold, Culture and Anarchy op.cit., p.51

<sup>67</sup> M. Arnold, *ibid*, p. 49

## **Modernity, Modernism and the English.**

The cultural dispositions of the English middle class were profoundly shaped around a historically determined response to modernity. Calinescu has argued that there are two interdependent modernities. There is the social modernity understood as the system of production and exchange, institutionalised by capitalism. This modernity, with its “confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology, the concern with time [as a measurable commodity], the cult of reason,” and so forth <sup>68</sup> has been opposed by cultural modernities such as the radical anti-bourgeois attitudes of Modernism. As Calinescu puts it, “what defines cultural modernity is its outright rejection of bourgeois modernity.” <sup>69</sup> What underpins this split between the two modernities is the contradictory class position of the intelligentsia. Pierre Bourdieu describes them as the dominated fraction of the dominant class, comparatively weak in their volume of economic capital (when measured against the bourgeoisie who control and profit from social modernity) but rich in cultural capital as against both the working and lower middle classes and the comparatively less prestigious cultural capital of the economically dominant fraction of the dominant class. <sup>70</sup> As we shall see, the English middle class are split however less between social modernity and cultural Modernism, than between social modernity and tradition.

If the ideologeme of the organic community tends to respect traditional artistic techniques, Modernism was modern precisely in its rejection of outmoded artistic techniques. As Perry Anderson notes, for modern art, the “tension with the established or consecrated canons” was a defining feature of its identity.<sup>71</sup> However, Modernism was anti-modern in its critical assault on the bourgeoisie’s commercial, cultural and moral values. Anderson argues that there were two quite different intellectual sources which fed into and sustained Modernism’s anti-bourgeois, anti-modernity critique. Historically, the first critique of capitalist progress came, as we have seen, from the cultural values of the aristocracy which

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<sup>68</sup> M. Calinescu, Five Faces of Modernity, Duke University Press, Durham, 1987, p.41

<sup>69</sup> M. Calinescu, ibid, p. 42.

<sup>70</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction. A social critique of the judgement of taste, Routledge, London, 1989.

<sup>71</sup> Perry Anderson, ‘Modernity and Revolution’ in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture (eds) C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, Macmillan, London, 1988, p.324.

provided a resource against “the ravages of the market as an organizing principle of culture and society.”<sup>72</sup> Aristocratic values could only persist (after the aristocracy had themselves become agrarian capitalists or found positions of power in the state’s military and political arms), because there were contradictions within bourgeois ideology as to whether everything in life should be subjected to the values of commodity exchange or whether some areas of life, like marriage, art and morality, should transcend such narrowly economic concerns.<sup>73</sup>

The other intellectual resource Anderson cites as feeding into Modernism’s critique of various aspects of capitalist modernity, came of course from socialism. This began to have a major impact on various cultural practices after the 1917 Russian revolution.<sup>74</sup> But whether fed by an aristocratic/feudal or socialist or some other intellectual resource, the distinguishing feature of most Modernist currents was that critiques of capitalist modernity were also combined with a delight in the capacity for change, transformation and construction which modernity brought. This latter aspect manifested itself in Modernism’s enthusiasm for the new production, media, communication and transport technologies that were blossoming. Perry Anderson has argued that what yokes these contrasting feelings of exhilaration and critique together, is the historical experience of combined and uneven development: rapid modernisation and industrialisation in those ‘backward’ areas of Europe (especially Russia, Germany and Italy) where Modernism flourished, helped produce a volatile proletariat and a still nascent, insecure bourgeoisie, unable to adopt a hegemonic position.

The historical circumstances in England were rather different and thus its conduciveness to Modernism proved extremely shallow. What Modernism existed had to be largely imported, both in literature and cinema.<sup>75</sup> The sense of both sharp contradictions and a set of open possibilities which combined and uneven development produced elsewhere, was entirely

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<sup>72</sup> P. Anderson, *ibid*, p.325.

<sup>73</sup> See T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of The Aesthetic* Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1990.

<sup>74</sup> But we could also cite other sources of revolt which influenced artists. For example, within Fauvism Rouault was influenced by radical Catholicism and Vlaminck by anarchism. See *concepts of modern art* (ed) N. Stangos, Thames and Hudson, London, 1994, pp.11-29.

<sup>75</sup> P. Anderson, England was a “beachhead for Eliot or Pound, offshore to Joyce, it produced virtually no significant native movement of a modernist type in the first decades of this century.” *op.cit.*, p.323.

missing. Instead of rapid industrialisation at the turn of the century, the gestation and evolution of capitalism in England had been developed over centuries. Thus the bourgeoisie consolidated its relationship with the aristocracy, while the English working class - the first proletariat, "coincided with the minimum availability of socialism as a structured ideology." <sup>76</sup> The relative stability of society and lack of intellectual resources for critique combined with a longer time frame for the development of capitalist modernity, meant that the shock and delight of the new, exerted a much less gripping fascination than it did in parts of mainland Europe. If the cultural appeal of modernity / Modernism was more muted in England, then the pull of the past, the appeal of tradition and the role of the organic community, was correspondingly greater.

### **Popular Culture and Restricted Modernity**

If an English dominated Britain proved to be inhospitable for the development of a radical culture of the intelligentsia along the lines to be found in Europe, neither did it prove to be fertile ground for a popular culture along the lines developed in America. To understand the centrality of Hollywood in the popular imagination, we have to understand how America represents a different social configuration of modernity to Europe generally and Britain specifically. <sup>77</sup> Comparatively speaking and for complex historical reasons, Europe's configuration of modernity can be defined, following Wagner, as 'restricted'. For all its tensions with capitalist modernity, the organic community provides the latter with something approaching an alibi. If capitalist modernity promises self autonomy and self development (unleashing tremendous forces of production) there are very specific boundaries to those open promises. Modernity's appeal to "self creation" was contradicted by the fact that modernity was marked by "strong boundaries between social groups as to the availability of liberties." <sup>78</sup> As Wagner notes, the nation was one of the key restrictions as to whether one qualified to enter 'modernity'. In Europe, membership of the nation *and status within it* was registered by homogenous cultural linguistic markers which privileged the middle class, the male members of that class, and the

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<sup>76</sup> P. Anderson, 'Origins of the Present Crisis' in Towards Socialism (eds) P. Anderson and R. Blackburn, Cornell University Press, New York, 1965, p. 21.

<sup>77</sup> P. Wagner, A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline Routledge, London, 1994, p. xi.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Wagner, *ibid*, p.5.

white ethnicity which dominated that class. Thus to be working class, to be a woman, to be from the colonies or a member of other diasporas such as the Jews, meant a qualified membership to Britain's modernity.

America by contrast was founded on the bedrock of European Enlightenment beliefs in progress, natural law, and liberation from the bonds of class, ethnicity, and religious dogma. In other words America was, as Jensen puts it, "founded to be modern."<sup>79</sup> This colonial liberal heritage was then underpinned by the westward expansion where "individuals and families invented communities to meet their own needs, and moved on if they did not."<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Wager argues that American modernity was being forged in a still 'primitive' embryonic, febrile social environment where social arrangements and institutions had to be consciously constructed more or less from the bottom up (having of course, first obliterated the 'primitive communism' of the American Indians). This stress on requiring to build up institutional arrangements out of very little established practices feeds into the culture, giving it a particularly strong stress on self definition, autonomy and individualism.<sup>81</sup> Add to this the immigrant status of the population and the economic 'take-off' in the late C19th and you have the foundations for developing a popular culture that is more demotic, inclusive (if assimilative), optimistic, and future orientated than Britain could possibly develop.

### **The Organic Community in Culture and Environment**

If in Hollywood / American popular culture, the dominant dialectic is between the present and a utopian future, in British culture, the dominant dialectic is between the present and a utopian past. These different temporal conceptions imply different configurations of social space. A dialectic between the present and a utopian future implies the transformation of social space whereas a dialectic between the present and a utopian past implies a rather more static and constraining social imaginary.

It is this dynamic which I want to explore in relation to the English literary project known as Leavisism, before tracing the connections and impact of

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<sup>79</sup> J. Jensen, Redeeming Modernity : Contradictions in media criticism Sage, London, 1990, p.69.

<sup>80</sup> J. Jensen, *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> P. Wagner, A Sociology of Modernity *op.cit.*, p.178.

that project on film criticism and popular film. F.R. Leavis was the key figure around the project to reconstitute English literature, the teaching and learning of which was to be a moral endeavour vital to check the “drift of civilization.”<sup>82</sup> In the early years of the C20th, English, where it was taught at all, was seen as a somewhat marginal subject, no more than a component in the national culture and a rather feminine subject at that.<sup>83</sup> During the 1920s, English became central to the study of a national culture. Its subject matter was redefined around a group of key texts while its mode of criticism - equally marked by the contours of the national culture - was “practical” (i.e. anti-theoretical), as Doyle notes,<sup>84</sup> but also intuitive.

The emergence of a new group of teachers and graduates in Cambridge and the success of Scrutiny, the Leavisite’s quarterly journal launched in 1932, has to be understood in the context of British society in the inter-war years. Mulhern cites the most important factors as: the changing composition and professionalisation of the intelligentsia (drawn - like Leavis himself - increasingly from the lower middle classes and displacing the ‘gentleman-scholar’); the rise of the mass media (whose low standards was to make the renewal of critical evaluation so urgent);<sup>85</sup> the decline of the Liberal Party and the partial rise of the Labour party (which was to put socialism/de-legitimisation of capitalism on the political agenda); economic decline and crisis (which generalised the sense of anxiety);<sup>86</sup> and the moral crisis resulting from the scientific erosion of religious belief (which made some other basis for ‘guidance’ (literature in this case) all the more necessary.<sup>87</sup> With his co-author Denys Thompson (also on the editorial board of Scrutiny,) Culture and Environment formed, with Leavis’s own Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture and Q.D. Leavis’s Fiction and The Reading Public, “a unitary and comprehensive argument that underlay the relatively discrete analyses that actually appeared in the pages of Scrutiny.”<sup>88</sup>

<sup>82</sup> F. R. Leavis and D. Thompson, Culture and Environment Chatto and Windus, London 1964, p.150.

<sup>83</sup> B. Doyle, “The hidden history of English Studies” in Re-Reading English (ed) P. Widdowson, Methuen, London, 1982, p.24.

<sup>84</sup> B. Doyle, *ibid*, p.25.

<sup>85</sup> F. Mulhern, The Moment of ‘Scrutiny’ New Left Books, London 1979, p. 9.

<sup>86</sup> F. Mulhern, *ibid* p.4-5.

<sup>87</sup> F. Mulhern, *ibid*, p.11.

<sup>88</sup> F. Mulhern, p. 51.

## The Organic Community

Probably the defining feature of the organic community is the way culture and society are inextricably linked. In the organic community leisure is not a compartmentalised segment of life - as it was to become - but is a by-product of work and everyday living. This is because "it was in their work for the most part that folk lived."<sup>89</sup> The importance of the condition of labour in their account gives Culture and Environment an anti-capitalist resonance. In the organic community, the worker was more autonomous, the work more diversified, their relationship to the 'product' more skilled, intimate and knowledgeable than was the norm in the C20th. 'Culture' as a mode of evaluation and judgement was woven into life in the way for example that the worker judged the 'quality' of raw materials and the uses they could be put to. Drawing on George Sturt's account of his own life in The Wheelwright's Shop, Leavis and Thompson declare that the relations between employers and employees used to be built around a shared anxiety "to maintain the standards and reputation of the firm." The workers'

"work was such that they were able to feel themselves fulfilled in it as self-respecting individuals...Besides their hands, their brains, imagination, conscience, sense of beauty and fitness - their personalities - were engaged and satisfied. Just as their master was not concerned merely for his profits, so they were not concerned merely for their wages."<sup>90</sup>

Linked to the idea of labour as a creative process is the notion of knowledge of the skills of work being acquired over time and through apprenticeship. A society in which tradition is highly prized is necessarily one based on collective memory and practice. The individual is understood as being part of an integrated and unified set of social relations. Their own labour was rooted in traditional craft skills that were woven into the fabric of the local economy and society. Village life was "coherent and self-explanatory"<sup>91</sup> This mode of life was more significant than internal hierarchies and conflicts within the community.

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<sup>89</sup> From George Sturt, Change in The Village, quoted by F. Leavis and D. Thompson in Culture and Environment, op.cit., p.68.

<sup>90</sup> F. R. Leavis and D. Thompson, op.cit. p.75.

<sup>91</sup> F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, op.cit., p.74.



One can draw not only diachronic connections with C19th writers like Ruskin, but some surprising synchronic connections as well. For Culture and Environment seems to be a very English version of Lukacs' History and Class Consciousness. Both were constructed around the binaries of past and present, organic/natural vs inorganic/inhuman, knowable nascent capitalist societies/unknowable fully commodified societies. A description of the modern world which laments the "dissolution and destruction of all 'natural' production units...'natural' relations which exhibit human relations more plainly" could *almost* have come from either book. <sup>92</sup>

The period of the organic community is not precisely dated in Culture and Environment. Sturt's work draws on a late C19th experience of decline, but the idealisation of the organic community seems to project back into an imaginary time prior to industrialisation, prior to the contemporary crisis of democracy and prior to the Empire (although a peculiar combination of ambition and haughty insularity in the Scrutiny project smacks of that inscription of imperial attitudes into culture which Said has explored). <sup>93</sup> Sturt's work functions like the last embers of a fire to which Leavis and Thompson come and blow on and rekindle. Their image of decline and the project of rekindling covers that forty year period between the 1880s and the 1920s which a number of writers have identified as the period of a sustained invention of tradition, <sup>94</sup> and wilful nostalgia. <sup>95</sup> Robertson has suggested that this was precisely the period in which modern sociology was founded and consequently inscribed with a nostalgic orientation. <sup>96</sup> We can add that the organic community which Leavis and Thompson reconstructed owes its potency to this context where it profoundly influenced subsequent cultural criticism and cultural production.

## **Desire and Method**

What kind of method does this image and imagining of the organic community lend itself to? The picture built up is of 'organic man' - which reminds us of the male dominated and masculine qualities of the imagined

<sup>92</sup> G. Lukacs, History And Class Consciousness Merlin Press, London, 1990, p.91.

<sup>93</sup> E. W. Said, Culture and Imperialism Chatto and Windus, London, 1993.

<sup>94</sup> E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (eds), The Invention of Tradition , Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.

<sup>95</sup> T. Nairn, The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy Hutchinson Radius, London, 1988.

<sup>96</sup> R. Robertson, Globalization, Social Theory and Global Culture , Sage, London, 1992, pp.146-148.

community invoked. Organic man is sturdy, down to earth, spontaneous, in a commonsense sort of way. Life in the organic community is active and vigorous, purposeful rather than frivolous or self indulgent. He is intimate with the locality and with the nuances and interrelations of social spaces. Thus organic man has a tactile relation to his environment for his was a labour which “tingled up in the niceties of touch, sight, scent.”<sup>97</sup> This tactile structure of feeling makes *experience* and *attention to concrete detail* highly valued. On this hinge, an empirical realism and the organic community are conjoined. This mode of evaluation (or discrimination, to use the Leavisite term) is inscribed into the very methodology of Culture and Environment which draws extensively on George Sturt’s work, Change In The Village and The Wheelwright’s Shop. Both books are rooted in Sturt’s own experience of growing up in ‘the valley’. The various themes of experience, traditional knowledge, evaluation, tactile work, insularity and ultimately loss, are evoked in this passage - quoted by Leavis and Thompson - from Sturt’s The Wheelwright’s Shop.

“The skilled workman was the final judge. Under the plane (it is little used now) or under the axe (it is all but obsolete) timber disclosed qualities hardly to be found otherwise. My own eyes know because my own hands have felt, but I cannot teach an outsider the difference between ash that is “frow as a carrot” or “doaty” or “biscuity”. In oak, in beech, these differences are equally plain, yet only to those who have been initiated by practical work.”<sup>98</sup>

The interweaving between culture and environment which the organic community achieves means that sensuousness, desire, is tightly integrated into labour and life. This is a harmonious sublimation reminiscent of Marcuse’s notion of “libidinal rationality”.<sup>99</sup> This was Marcuse’s utopian concept describing a reconciliation between the cognitive and affective realms, between reason and desire. Marcuse finds prefigured in Kant’s aesthetics a vision which he projects forward into a future and different society where the fissures between subject and object, individual and society, consciousness and unconscious, are replaced by self sublimation

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<sup>97</sup> F. R. Leavis and D. Thompson, op.cit., p.90.

<sup>98</sup> F. R. Leavis and D. Thompson, op.cit., p.76.

<sup>99</sup> H. Marcuse, Eros and Civilisation, A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud Ark Paperbacks, London, 1987, p.199.

“where libido is transformed into social phenomenon without losing its erotic roots.”<sup>100</sup> In contrast to Marcuse’s projection into a radically transformed future, the organic community recovers its utopia in the past. The price to be paid for this is a certain freezing of time and desire, of history, production and human agency. For if the utopia is projected back into the past, that utopian community must suppress the seeds of modernity that lie within it if the future which is the reader/spectator’s present, is to be fended off. Those seeds of modernity lie in discontent, in unsatisfied longings which come into conflict with the organic community’s social fetters and call it into question from within. In Culture and Environment desire is figured as harmoniously integrated with the social order, but within the ideologeme generally, there is always the potential for desire to become *unstitched* from the existing social fabric.

If the organic community attempts to reconcile desire and the social order, it also attempts to combine an empirical method with metaphysical ambitions. Experience, so degraded under modernity, is the very cornerstone of transcending the grubby material world for a spiritually finer social order. This transcendence is not to be achieved (as it was for Marcuse for example) through systematic theorisation, but through attention to the particular and the concrete.<sup>101</sup> Lukacs traced this split between the particular and the general, the concrete and the abstract, back to the commodity form.<sup>102</sup> We can see how Culture and Environment works that tension out in a peculiarly English manner, reproducing that odd combination of idealistic, even metaphysical traditionalism and empirical ‘realism’ which Perry Anderson complained were responsible for the “miasma of commonplace prejudices and taboos” which characterised the British intelligentsia, namely “mystagogy (towards institutions)” and “philistinism (towards ideas).”<sup>103</sup> This tension was to be reconfigured more productively in post-1968 cultural and historical studies between the competing claims of theory and lived experience, structuralism and humanism.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> H. Marcuse, *ibid*, p.209.

<sup>101</sup> T. Eagleton, Literary Theory Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983, pp.43-44.

<sup>102</sup> G. Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness *op.cit.*, pp.83-149.

<sup>103</sup> P. Anderson, ‘Origins’ *op.cit.*, p.32.

<sup>104</sup> S. Hall, “Cultural Studies: two paradigms” in What Is Cultural Studies? A Reader (ed) J. Storey, Arnold, London, 1996, pp.31-48.

## Modernity

Four key characteristics of the organic community emerge from the discussion so far: there is a strong emphasis on vertical integration, on the reconciliation between culture and nature, on an immanent self identity and on authenticity. Each of these characteristics are further clarified by their *apparent* antithesis: modernity. Towards the end of the 19th century, the organic community was systematically dismembered by the forces of modernity - or by what Leavis and Thompson call, with bitter irony, 'progress'. Now knowledges and skills become redundant as self supporting work withers and 'wage slaves' learn new low skilled jobs driven by technological change. If under the organic community work and culture were inextricably linked, the deskilling and narrowing of work resulting from the standardization of labour, the pooling of it into factories, the centrality of the profit motive and the orientation towards national and international markets and competition, all conspire to rob labour of its cultured qualities, its rootedness, in Kantian terms, its judgement. Culture indeed becomes separated off from work into an alienated leisure time - 'decreation', a form of unrewarding play routinely entered into as an escape from unrewarding work. The community of integrated social relations which once obtained is replaced by a society of atomized individuals "linked only by contiguity, the system of transport and the supply of gas, water and electricity." <sup>105</sup> 'Community' then is merely a bonding of rational convenience.

Leavis and Thompson target America as the paradigm of western modernity - the place where social intercourse has been most eroded by individualism and privatisation of experience. <sup>106</sup> Modernity is characterised by rapid and continual change which does not value the past. Writing about the industrial Midlands, D.H. Lawrence argued that "[t]here was a gap in the continuity of consciousness almost American, but industrial really." <sup>107</sup> For the Leavisites, the task was to bridge this gap, to reconnect the present with "the memory of the old order" <sup>108</sup> if there was to be any cultural renewal. I will argue that a similar strategy of bridging this "gap in the

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<sup>105</sup> F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, op.cit., p.2.

<sup>106</sup> F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, ibid, p.65.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Culture and Environment , ibid, p.93.

<sup>108</sup> F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, ibid, p.97.

continuity of consciousness" is also central to much of British film culture.

### **Mass Culture and Feminisation**

D.H. Lawrence was an important figure for the Leavisites because he chronicled the decline of the organic community which earlier writers could take for granted. This Lawrentian observation of an industrial town is tucked away in one passage quoted by Leavis and Thompson: "...ugly, ugly ugly, followed by the plaster and gilt horror of the cinema with its wet picture announcements, "A Woman's Love," <sup>109</sup> The association of mass culture with the feminine is a logical outcome if the organic world that has been lost is associated with the healthy vigour of the masculine. The Leavis/Thompson position is typical here rather than unique. The gendering of mass culture as feminine and high culture (whether Modernist or traditional) as "the privileged realm of male activities," was widespread throughout European critical and cultural practices. <sup>110</sup>

Like the Frankfurt School critique, mass culture was perceived by Leavis and Thompson to dismantle the steady, assured, autonomous (masculine) subjectivity of the past and put in its place a new kind of subjectivity suited to its new environment. This latter subjectivity is *emotionally* weak. For mass culture has brought with it the "debasement of emotional life" and "emotional falsity" <sup>111</sup> Advertising is the paradigmatic example, nurturing and playing on whims and constructing feelings based on fashion rather than moral substance. But advertising is part of the same continuum of mass culture generally in which sentimentality holds sway. Sentimentality or false, manipulated emotion, is a key derogatory word in the Leavisite vocabulary. Its association with the genre of romance further equating all that is bad in mass culture with the feminine. An opposition is set up between mass culture (which encourages "day-dreaming or 'fantasying' ") <sup>112</sup> and 'realism'.

I have suggested that in the ideologeme of the organic community, any

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<sup>109</sup> F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, *ibid*, p.94.

<sup>110</sup> A. Huyssen, 'Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other' in Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture (ed) T. Modleski, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1986, p.191.

<sup>111</sup> F. R. Leavis and D. Thompson, *op.cit.*p.48, and p.51, respectively.

<sup>112</sup> F. R. Leavis and D. Thompson, *ibid*, p.100.

sense of surplus desire, that is desire not harmoniously sublimated into a production, would be problematic. This is why Leavis and Thompson are so damning about fantasy and emotion and consumption, since it is a sign precisely of surplus desire, of feelings, wants, longings not fully accommodated within the existing order. The irony is that the organic community is itself a fantasy produced precisely by such longings. It is a utopia which must deny the utopian sensibility. Within capitalist modernity by contrast, commodities are charged with the task of generating and satisfying wants and wishes. But what if, as with the organic community, there are desires which remain unsatisfied and which come into conflict with the social fetters of the times? Then mass culture becomes a repository of desires that conflict with the social relations of domination.

### **Discrimination and Film Culture.**

Despite its flaws and unexamined assumptions, the fact that Culture and Environment takes advertising and the mass media as part of its subject matter - if only to train readers against its seductions - makes it a foundational text for media and cultural studies. The key question which it raises but cannot answer - how to approach mass culture in a way that is somehow 'critical' but not condemnatory - remains equally valid today when every self respecting academic celebrates mass/popular culture. Film was one of the more significant and insidious forms of mass culture to threaten what the Leavisites held dear, yet the very conditions which had produced the Leavisite grouping - namely the professionalisation of the intelligentsia and the expansion of cultural production - was to produce film critics in the print media and filmmakers who took the medium and its potentialities seriously. Thus the themes and biases of Leavisism - which organised and clarified the terms by which the middle classes would accumulate cultural capital - were appropriated, but then also adapted so that the task came to be to discriminate *within* film culture rather than *against* film culture as a whole. The terms of this discrimination within film culture and its links with Leavisism can now be indicated.

It is, as Charles Barr has noted, impossible to exaggerate the centrality of the 1940s to any reading of British film history.<sup>113</sup> This was the period when critical discourses constructed the British film as having 'come of

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<sup>113</sup> C. Barr, 'Amnesia and Schizophrenia' in All Our Yesterdays BFI, London 1986, p.11.

age'. As John Ellis has demonstrated, such discourses sought to discriminate between the 'quality' film and mere entertainment.<sup>114</sup> Because their medium was film rather than the literary canon, the film critics and writers had a more democratic turn to their Leavisism. Against Leavis' notion of cultural values being protected by a critical elite, critical discourses around film hoped to train a large enough section of the mass audience to demand and therefore increase, the 'quality' film. Writing a cinemagoer's manual in 1948, Andrew Buchanan could hope that "in time, when there are enough people like you with sound knowledge about films, programmes will become better and better in order to satisfy you."<sup>115</sup> The image Ellis uses to describe the critics' strategy is that of an upward spiral where demand for 'quality' films and supply support one another and increase one another.<sup>116</sup> One of the key reasons why the critics found their ideal object in the 1940s, was the fusion that appeared to take place between the documentary and fictional film.

The documentary was already established as the 'quality' film by the early 1930s. John Grierson, had been appointed head of the documentary Film Unit at the Empire Marketing Board in 1928.<sup>117</sup> Grierson's upbringing formed an individual with strikingly similar interests to Leavis. Both believed in the power of education to make the world a better place. This radicalism was combined with a deep respect for both authority on the one hand and the dignity of labour on the other.<sup>118</sup> While Leavis and Thompson perceived this 'dignity' to have been dismembered by the onslaught of the twentieth century, Grierson's Film Unit was modelled on artisanal working practices,<sup>119</sup> while documentaries such as Industrial Britain represented "workers as craftsmen."<sup>120</sup> The diffusing of social conflict evident in the image of the organic community was now mapped onto contemporary mass society in an effort to promote "the existing order

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<sup>114</sup> J. Ellis, 'Art, Culture and Quality' in Screen vol, 19. no.3 Autumn, 1978.

<sup>115</sup> A. Buchanan, Going To The Cinema Phoenix House Limited, London, 1948, p.2.

<sup>116</sup> J. Ellis, op.cit., pp.38-39.

<sup>117</sup> S. Hood, 'John Grierson and The Documentary Film Movement' in British Cinema History (eds) J. Curran and V. Porter, Barnes and Noble Books, New Jersey, 1983, p.101.

<sup>118</sup> S. Hood, op.cit., p.100.

<sup>119</sup> A. Kuhn, 'British Documentary in the 1930s and "Independence": Recontextualising a Film Movement' in Traditions of Independence (eds) D. Machpherson and P. Willemen BFI, London, 1980.

<sup>120</sup> S. Hood, op.cit., p.108.

and its capacity for gradual social amelioration.”<sup>121</sup>

Grierson also helped found (and wrote for) Cinema Quarterly in 1932. The journal was interested in the theoretical and cultural debates generated by European cinema and how they impacted on or were relevant to the British documentary movement. This marks an important difference with the Leavisite project. The international nature of the film medium meant that some strands of European Modernism could filter into cultural commentary and film practice rather more easily than in the case of constructing an insular English literary canon. It was however, a politically muted Modernism. The angry iconoclasm evident in Bunuel's L'Age d'Or (1930), the primitivism, spontaneity and interest in sexuality of surrealism generally, appealed less than the experiments of the Soviet montage filmmakers which, precisely because they were more disciplined and wedded to 'social building' (albeit socialist building) - were more recuperable for a social democratic project.<sup>122</sup> At the level of aesthetics, tensions existed within the documentary movement between its more empirical wing and its more formalistic strands (as represented by such figures as Humphrey Jennings<sup>123</sup> and Alberto Cavalcanti).<sup>124</sup> There is little doubt however that the empirical/rationalising wing articulated better with the wider cultural formation. The empirical realism which dominated British film culture sought to figure the social (as) community despite all the atomizing and polarising effects of capitalist modernity. It had a predilection for "formal invisibility"<sup>125</sup> because the abstractions of a fullblown self reflexive Modernism threatened to complicate the revealing of the social community in all its tangible, concrete glory.

The dominance of empirical realism conditioned the critics' response to the fiction film as well. Just as, for Leavis and Thompson, the organic

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<sup>121</sup> B. Winston, Claiming The Real BFI, London, 1995, p36.

<sup>122</sup> P. Wollen identifies two currents within Modernism - Surrealism, with its sensuous, spontaneous, primitivist/mythic impulses which can be seen as a revolt against an overly rationalised capitalism and Constructivism, wedded to reason, rationalism and utility which can be seen as a revolt against the anarchic and irrational aspects of capitalism. See Raiding The Icebox, reflections on twentieth-century culture Verso, London, 1993, p.192.

<sup>123</sup> G. Nowell Smith, 'Humphrey Jennings: Surrealist Observer' in All Our Yesterdays op.cit. pp.321-333.

<sup>124</sup> See for example Cavalcanti's contemporary, Herbert Read, praising Cavalcanti's exploration of sound montage in Cinema Quarterly, vol.3, no.1 Autumn, 1934, pp.17-21.

<sup>125</sup> J. Petley, 'The Lost Continent' in All Our Yesterdays op.cit., p.99



community could not be defined without favourable comparison to the 'mechanical' community of the twentieth century, so, as Pam Cook puts it, the "realist quality canon could not have existed without...scurrilously inauthentic movies against which the critics defined the terms of a national cinema." <sup>126</sup> Cook was writing specifically about Gainsborough melodramas in the 1940s. As with the gendering of the organic community (masculine)/mass culture (feminine) so there is discrimination (in both the Leavisite and everyday sense of the word) within film culture. Realism is associated with the masculine and the Gainsborough costume drama (with its emphasis on fantasy and masquerade) with the feminine (with its attendant train of negative associations for empirical realism: artificiality, inauthenticity, etc).

'Scurrilous' films also included those which were influenced by German Expressionism's self reflexivity around *mise en scene*. This was certainly one strand in the aesthetics of Powell and Pressburger and together with their romantic mysticism and spiritualism, ensured that their films were received with considerable ambivalence on the part of the critics. <sup>127</sup> Not only individual filmmakers but much of the gothic tradition in film culture has been effectively submerged by the dominance of empirical realism. <sup>128</sup> More recently critics have worked productively with the realism/fantasy paradigm by deconstructing it. Barr finds in a film like Brief Encounter (1946) "hailed at the time for its mature realism" a text very much orientated towards the interior realm of subjectivity and fantasy, <sup>129</sup> while the apparently 'escapist' costume dramas of Gainsborough can be read as addressing real shifts and contradictions in the role of women during and after the Second World War.<sup>130</sup> Whereas Leavisite critical discourses conceive the text as (ideally) emulating the organic unity of the (ideal) social community, <sup>131</sup> post-1960s academic film studies has been much more alive to the possibility that the

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<sup>126</sup> P. Cook, Fashioning The Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema BFI, London, 1996, p.87.

<sup>127</sup> See R. Durnat's perceptive and generally sympathetic essay which nevertheless betrays some unease with Powell's "technical fireworks" in Powell, Pressburger and Others (ed) I. Christie BFI, London, 1978, pp.65-74.

<sup>128</sup> J. Petley, op.cit.

<sup>129</sup> C. Barr, op.cit., p.17.

<sup>130</sup> P. Cook, 'Melodrama and The Women's Picture' in Gainsborough Melodrama BFI, London, Dossier No.18 (eds) S. Aspinall, R. Murphy, P.Cook, p.21.

<sup>131</sup> J. Ellis, 'Art, Culture and Quality' op.cit., p.23-24.

text may be fissured by contradictory values and ideologies. 132

### **The Private Life of Henry VIII and Film Criticism**

There are two ways in which the ideologeme of the organic community fits with the concerns which predominated the critical reception of ...Henry VIII. Firstly, in the general project to situate the film within the context of a unitary film culture - despite the fact that it was pitched at the American market and made by European emigres. What is at stake in trying to position the film in this way, is not only a unitary British cinema but a unitary national culture as well. This articulates very easily with the homogenising, unifying dynamic of the organic community. The second way in which the organic community articulates with the film's critical reception is the particular characteristics of the film which the critics praised or condemned -but either way did so from within the same critical assumptions as to what constitutes 'realism'. As we have seen, an empirical realism is the privileged (although bearing in mind Powell and Pressburger by no means exclusive aesthetic), method for the organic community. Thus the critical reception represses the melodramatic/fantasy and Modernist components of the film.

Picturegoer, a mainstream magazine aimed largely at women, declared ...Henry VIII to be "the finest picture we have so far turned out in our studios." 133 That opinion was widely held amongst the movie going public if theatre runs and box-office returns are any indication (see below). It was also a critical success insofar as the film was perceived as working within a realist aesthetic. For example Kinematograph Weekly, a trade and industry paper, found the film to employ,

"Historical facts...to provide a perfect background of authentic drama...Every phase of Tudor Court, domestic, sporting and political life is mirrored with colourful accuracy." 134

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132 Influential here was P. Machery's A Theory of Literary Production Routledge, Kegan Paul, London, 1978.

133 Picturegoer, Sep. 9 1933, p.10.

134 Kinematograph Weekly, Aug 24, 1933, p.17.

In Cinema Quarterly, Forsyth Hardy (later Grierson's biographer) gave some qualification to the film's representation of history. Accepting the film's restricted focus announced in its title, he nevertheless suggests that a great opportunity was lost in ignoring broader historical themes. However, he goes on to applaud the film's "sincerity" and "convincing historical atmosphere." He notes that we never "think of Henry and his Court as mere characters in a charade."<sup>135</sup> This is intriguing because it was precisely the inability of the critic to *believe* in the drama that led to the critical opprobrium heaped on Gainsborough's costume melodramas. Yet the belief in ...Henry VIII is hardly rooted in any profound sense of historical analysis. For Hardy goes on to declare that the "grossness of the King's manners, though startling to our generation is doubtless true to the period."<sup>136</sup> Attention to apparently authentic historical detail is important to these critics just as attention to detail was a key component in Leavis and Thompson's organic community. Another example from Hardy finds him praising the film's attention to "the smallest detail in [for example] the costumes designed by John Armstrong."<sup>137</sup> The film's realist aesthetic appears to offer a transparent window onto the past and in no other medium could such an unbroken continuum between the present and the past be posited than in the concrete detail of the visual image.

We have already noted C. R. Beard's positivistic criticisms of the film but he was generally an isolated voice in terms of ...Henry VIII's initial critical reception. For if he articulated the empirical realism, which the critics generally shared, to an absurd degree, the critics' own discourse combined their empirical bent with certain aesthetic criteria. The critical rush to believe that the details of the film were authentic underlines the fact that it is not so much their historical convictions which have been convinced, but merely their aesthetic preferences for a certain kind of film. Ironically, that kind of film is much closer to the classical model popularised by Hollywood, but this is concealed by their emphasis on the details by which a core English *mise-en-scene* is reconstructed.

The critics' proximity to Hollywood's aesthetic norms are indicated by their ambivalence towards Hepworth's attempts in the 1920s to make 'distinctive'

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<sup>135</sup> Cinema Quarterly, Autumn, 1933, p.39.

<sup>136</sup> Cinema Quarterly, op.cit., p.40.

<sup>137</sup> Cinema Quarterly, ibid.

British historical films by rejecting Hollywood's aesthetic paradigm and reconnecting back to an earlier, 'primitive' cinema. Higson discusses Hepworth's narrative economy and mise en scene as belonging to a 'pictorialist' rather than classical narrative tradition.<sup>138</sup> It is perhaps this tradition which the critics are covertly referring to when they praised the convincing quality of ...Henry VIII. In contrast to the pictorialist tradition, with its emphasis on aesthetically pleasing images, the critics felt that the film's pageantry was not merely set up for the camera, but integrated into a sufficiently tightly constructed narrative. The extent to which this perceived advance in British cinema could be framed as an endogenous development, internal to British cinema, or as an indication of Hollywood's influence was always going to be a moot point. For as Pam Cook has suggested,

"The idea that our national cinema might consist of a heterogenous amalgam of visual styles and formal strategies appropriated from other cultures appears to be anathema to those concerned with constructing its identity."<sup>139</sup>

Thus when ...Henry VIII was re-released in 1946, its status as a breakthrough movie had been diminished by the successes of British film during the Second World War.<sup>140</sup> For the left wing journal Tribune, the film could be located as a product of the Hollywood "formula" for filmmaking.

"No time was wasted on "arty" tricks of photography and direction; no new contribution was made to the technique of filmmaking. With moneybags in both hands, and with one eye steadily fixed on Cecil B de Mille and the other on the box-office, Korda gave the film "the works": all star cast, costumes, lavish sets, unrationed vulgarity, historical travesty."<sup>141</sup>

No European influences in the film are detectable (there are no "arty tricks") and any authentic representation of Britishness is also rejected. The film has shifted and is now located as being wholly within the Hollywood

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<sup>138</sup> A. Higson, Waving The Flag, op.cit., pp.27-63.

<sup>139</sup> P. Cook, Fashioning The Nation op.cit., p.8.

<sup>140</sup> Monthly Film Bulletin, July 1946, p.95.

<sup>141</sup> Tribune, 19th July, 1946, page number unknown.

paradigm in its bid to break into the lucrative American market.

Yet for C.A. Lejeune writing in 1933 the film is “national to the backbone.”<sup>142</sup> She notes that the film’s director, Alexander Korda, was a Hungarian, but sees no relevance in that. This was not the only European connection. As I have already noted, Korda’s brother, Vincent worked on the film as art designer,<sup>143</sup> the film was partly scripted by another Hungarian, Lajos Biro and the French cameraman was Georges Périnal, who had worked with such modernist luminaries as Jean Epstein on Six et demi-onze, (1925) for Jean Cocteau on Le Sang D’ Un Poete (1930) and on several films with René Clair, including le Million (1931). The film was also partly financed by the Italian impresario, Ludovic Toeplitz de Grand Ry. Lejeune, for her part, does suggest an analogy between Charles Laughton’s performance and the German actor, Emil Jannings. Yet the reference is invoked less to suggest influence than superiority (Laughton out Jannings, Jannings). Thus Lejeune locates the film as belonging firmly in one hermetically sealed culture, suggesting that the film is “as broadly and staunchly English as a baron of beef and a tankard of best homebrew.”<sup>144</sup> Lejeune notes the novel narrative structure of the film, stating that it “has thrown over all ideas of conventional film plot.”<sup>145</sup> Certainly in its act/scene structure one could suggest that the film is informed by Elizabethan/Jacobean drama, differentiating it from Hollywood’s integration of 19th literary narrative and melodrama modes. But Lejeune goes on to specify the effects of this ‘novel’ structure by arguing that the film concentrates on the development of a single character. However, as I shall argue in more detail later, the film’s narrative strategies are certainly different from the Hollywood film, but the effect of this is almost precisely the opposite of what Lejeune argues, insofar as it *disperses* the narrative across an (organic) *community* of characters.

The main assumption underpinning these responses is that insular myth of the “island race” that constitutes Britishness as a pure and fixed essence which the film is either true to (Lejeune) or departs from (Tribune). A broader view might see this assumption as characteristic of most

<sup>142</sup> The C.A. Lejeune Film Reader, (ed) A. Lejeune, Carcanet, London, 1991, p.89. Written originally in October 1933.

<sup>143</sup> See C. A. Surowiec, Accent on Design: Four European Art Directors BFI, London, 1992.

<sup>144</sup> The C.A. Lejeune Reader, op.cit.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

conceptions of national culture. The extent to which Hollywood and/or European cinema might be constitutive of British cinema is not discussed.

Writing in Film Weekly, Jean Straker argued more unusually, that ...Henry VIII was made from a central European perspective and that it represents "England and its ways and customs" in a way that is "quite alien to the native intelligence."<sup>146</sup> Although this is what Straker applauds about the film, there is a lack of specifics or even speculation as to what might constitute 'Europeanness' or 'Englishness' and what their cinematic manifestations might be. Again there is the assumption concerning the exclusivity of cultural identities: the film is perceived to be entirely within one cultural formation.

A more recent discussion of the film by C.S. Tashiro does attempt to discuss ...Henry VIII's textual qualities in more detail and draws on post -1960s film theory to help him. Tashiro argues that we should re-evaluate the perjorative descriptions of British cinema (e.g. its clumsy slowness and theatricality) as elements that mark its specificity and make it interesting to study. His analysis attempts to situate the film within a European film culture by arguing that Henry VIII violates and endangers the classical narrative structure popularised by Hollywood. For example he argues that the shot which introduces Henry into the film "is neither prepared nor motivated". His entrance stands more or less outside any exchange of looks and is "addressed to the audience for pictorial appreciation" rather than being embedded in the flow of the narrative.<sup>147</sup> Here then we see Tashiro repositioning the film in that pictorialist tradition which the film's contemporary critics had largely rejected but which Higson sees as constituting a residual but persistent current in British cinema. Tashiro's point is that there is an 'aesthetic' rather than narrative logic at work.

"The shot is perfectly symmetrical with Henry standing at dead centre in the image, legs spread apart, his body fully frontal to the camera in a pose reminiscent of the famous portrait of the King by one of the followers of Hans Holbein the Younger...In its denial of depth, its aggressive foregrounding of the graphic nature of the image, this shot

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<sup>146</sup> Film Weekly, Sep. 7, 1934, p. 8.

<sup>147</sup> C.S. Tashiro, "Fear and Loathing of British Cinema" in Spectator vol. 14, no. 2, Spring, 1994, p. 26.

has an immediate impact equal to its rhetorical purpose of figuring the King visually before his dramatic participation.”<sup>148</sup>

The limitation is that this formalistic analysis is not articulated in any sustained or convincing way with the wider cultural configurations of Britishness. Thus the implication that the shot has at an abstract level “an immediate impact” conceals the meaning of the shot, which I will argue later, works to diminish the impact of Henry as a protagonist. As we shall see, the attention to detail which the critics praised, is a subset of a broader aesthetic system (itself articulated with the ideologeme of the organic community) that turns on the non-heroic, comic and ironic modes which are covertly being constructed as ‘realistic’ by comparison with the heroic narratives of Hollywood. To bring this out however requires not only Tashiro’s close textual analysis, but its articulation with a wider cultural frame. I provide below a textual analysis of the film which will situate the film in relation to Hollywood, European cinema, the organic community and its attendant aesthetic, empirical realism, as well as other (less critically prestigious) strands of British film culture. However, the wider cultural frame and the specific cinematic text are also mediated by the industrial conditions of production. It is to that which I now briefly turn.

### **Korda and the Context of Production.**

The circumstances which brought Alexander Korda to Britain in 1931 and laid the foundations for his career as a British filmmaker, have their origins in the domination of the world film market secured by Hollywood after the First World War. The conflict confirmed the decline of the European powers and the ascendancy of America which had loaned money to Allied nations to finance the war effort. By the end of the war in 1918, America held substantial debts abroad.<sup>149</sup> This shift in economic power was reflected in increasingly unequal flows of trade within the film industry. In 1913, 32 million feet of film was exported from America. The figure had increased exponentially to 235 million feet by 1925.<sup>150</sup> Conversely, the US imported

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<sup>148</sup> C.S. Tashiro, *ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> K. Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market 1907-1934* BFI, London, 1985, p.61.

<sup>150</sup> T.H. Guback, ‘Hollywood’s International Market’ in *The American Film Industry* (ed) T. Balio, University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, 1985, p.465.

16 million feet of film in 1913 but a mere 7 million feet by 1925.<sup>151</sup> Respectively, imports into North America went from 50% of exports to less than 3% of exports over the same period. In 1925 Hollywood had captured 95% of the U.K. film market and had achieved slightly lesser but nevertheless commanding positions of dominance in other European countries.

The specific economic conditions for Hollywood's global hegemony lay in its exploitation of a huge home market. This market had 20,000 cinemas in 1925 (compared to the 4000 cinemas available in the U.K at that time).<sup>152</sup> This market was not shared by hundreds of small companies which would have greatly diminished their global reach but by an oligopoly of eight companies which controlled 90% of box office revenues in America by the late 1920s.<sup>153</sup> This oligopoly was itself hierarchically split between the 'Big Five' (vertically integrated across production, distribution and exhibition) and the 'Little Three' who owned production facilities only. Among this latter group was United Artists who were to play an important role in Korda's ambitious plans.

Through out the teens escalating production costs in America raised barriers of entry to the film industry and squeezed out smaller competitors.<sup>154</sup> Such oligopolistic tendencies in American capitalism had become accepted economic practice by the end of the nineteenth century<sup>155</sup> and the adoption of such practices within the film industry ensured that its potential profitability would be realised by American capital.<sup>156</sup> Having amortized its costs within its home market, Hollywood could afford to export its expensive products abroad at a price cheap enough to undercut its foreign competitors until a stranglehold could be established in national markets around the world.

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<sup>151</sup> T.H.Guback, *ibid*, p. 468-469.

<sup>152</sup> M. Dickinson and S. Street, Cinema and State: The Film Industry and The British Government 1927-1984. BFI, London, 1985, p.10.

<sup>153</sup> D. Gomery, The Hollywood Studio System Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1986, p.9.

<sup>154</sup> G. Mitchell, 'The Consolidation of the American Film Industry 1915-1920' Cine-tracts, nos. 6, 1979, pp.28-36 and 7/8 1979, pp.63-70.

<sup>155</sup> J. Staiger, 'Economic and Signifying Practices In The First Years of Hollywood.' Wide Angle vol.4, no.3 1980, p.14.

<sup>156</sup> M. Chanan, 'The Emergence of an Industry' in British Cinema History (eds)J. Curran and V. Porter, Barnes and Noble Books, New Jersey, 1983, p.43.



In the 1920s, Germany, France and Italy all legislated strategies to afford some measure of protection to their film industries in the face Hollywood's domination. That domination was facilitated by the divisions of interest within national film industries. European banks had invested in the industry, but their capital was largely tied up in the exhibition sector which, together with distributors, had a vested interest in supplying the proven successes of Hollywood's product.<sup>157</sup> Within Britain, film production faced virtual extinction at the end of 1924.<sup>158</sup> Ranged against the alliance between exhibitors, distributors and Hollywood, film producer interests would have had insignificant lobbying power, but their cause was taken up by the Federation of British Industries (FBI). As Dickinson and Street argue, the wider context for understanding the agitation of such manufacturing interests as the FBI and the sympathetic response of politicians like Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lister - was the debate concerning whether Britain should continue a policy of Free Trade or whether protectionist measures should be developed.<sup>159</sup> One can regard the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act as a protectionist Trojan horse entering the crumbling citadel of Free Trade. After the Wall Street crash, protectionist voices grew in confidence and backing until there was a decisive adoption of protectionist policies in 1932.

The key component of the 1927 Act which concerns us was the imposition on distributors and exhibitors "to acquire and show a minimum 'quota' of British films out of the total number they handled." <sup>160</sup> The quotas for exhibitors was set at 5 % in 1929 rising to 20% by 1936-39 while the distributors quota was to rise from 7.5% to 20% during the same period.<sup>161</sup> It was hoped by this method to stimulate British film production and indeed between 1926 (when it became clear that there was to be some form of Government intervention) and 1932, the number of British production companies more than doubled from 21 to 46. <sup>162</sup> However the capital attracted into the production sector was to polarise film production between very low budget films financed by American companies so as to fulfil the quota obligations and on the other hand, increasingly lavish, big budget productions orientated towards the international market.

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<sup>157</sup> V. Porter On Cinema Pluto Press, London, 1985, p.51.

<sup>158</sup> S. Hartog, 'State Protection of a Beleagured Industry' British Cinema History op.cit., p.59.

<sup>159</sup> M. Dickinson and S. Street, Cinema and State op.cit., pp.6-7.

<sup>160</sup> M. Dickinson and S. Street, Cinema and State op.cit., p.5.

<sup>161</sup> V. Porter, On Cinema op.cit., p.78.

<sup>162</sup> M. Dickinson and S. Street, Cinema and State op.cit., p.39.

Contemporary observers noted that the low budget films - the so called 'quota quickies', further damaged the reputation of the British film industry with British audiences. Yet although made cheaply, quickly and funded only to comply with the quota laws, it was recognised that they at least provided the opportunity of work for aspiring directors, technicians, actors and actresses.<sup>163</sup>

It was as a director of 'quota quickies' that Korda came to Britain in the employ of the Hollywood major, Paramount Studios. Having established himself, he registered his own company, London Films Productions in February 1932 and made a further five Paramount-British quota films.<sup>164</sup> In this period then, Korda consolidated his contacts within the industry and his reputation as a talented director/producer with such critical successes as Service for Ladies and Wedding Rehearsal. In May 1933 he secured a funding and distribution deal for ...Henry VIII from United Artists.<sup>165</sup> Formed originally to distribute the films of its four famous founders - Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Charles Chaplin and D.W. Griffith - U.A. was in crisis by the late 1920s as the fortunes of Pickford, Fairbanks, and Griffith declined and Chaplin's features became ever fewer. U.A. had no production facilities of their own and so, looking for new product to distribute, they turned to Britain and to London Films in particular. The importance of London Films to U.A.'s survival is indicated by the fact that Korda was to become a partner in U.A. in 1935.<sup>166</sup>

The Private Life of Henry VIII cost £93,710<sup>167</sup> and had its world premiere in Paris, followed by the prestigious Radio City Music Hall in New York. It was to gross a respectable \$500,000 in the United States.<sup>168</sup> The film's British

<sup>163</sup> E.G. Cousins' review of a quota quickie called Chelsea Life advocates that readers go and see the film because of the budding talents at work, in Picturegoer Sep. 9, 1933, p.28.

<sup>164</sup> R. Low, Filmmaking in 1930s Britain Allen and Unwin, London 1985, pp.165-166

<sup>165</sup> Kinematograph Weekly, May 25, 1933, p.1.

<sup>166</sup> A. Slide, The American Film Industry: A Historical Dictionary Greenwood Press, New York, 1986, p.358.

<sup>167</sup> M. Dickinson and S. Street, Cinema and State op.cit., p.86. This figure almost certainly includes post production costs. Estimates vary for the amount of money available for the actual production of the film. Lejeune quotes £60,000 (Nash's Pall Mall Magazine Dec/Jan 1936/7, p.112), Rachel Low suggests that estimates vary between £50,000-80,000 (Filmmaking in 1930s Britain Allen and Unwin, London, 1985, p. 167).

<sup>168</sup> T. Balio, Grand Design: History of the American Cinema 1930-1939 Charles Scribners's Sons, New York/ Maxwell Macmillan, Toronto, 1993, p. 34.

premiere was at Leicester Square in October 1933 where it was screened for 14 weeks. It exhibited in Paris for 28 weeks, in Broadway for 20 weeks, in Berlin for 10 weeks, in Vienna for six, Budapest for seven, Brussels for 13, Copenhagen for six and Stockholm for 5 weeks.<sup>169</sup> By 1936 the film had raised £1, 600,000 at the box office<sup>170</sup> although by April 1937 receipts for London Films totalled a mere £210,000.<sup>171</sup> Charles Laughton became the first British actor in a British film to win an Oscar.<sup>172</sup> According to Korda, the film was less successful in the colonies.<sup>173</sup> Certainly it is an early example of British cinema's inability to acknowledge the presence of black people in Britain. The preferred strategy for dealing with black characters (and tapping into the Imperial market) was one which Korda (as producer) and his brother Zoltan, helped develop in the 1930s. As Lola Young has argued, adventures such as Elephant Boy (Robert Flaherty / Zoltan Korda) 1937), The Drum (Zoltan Korda, 1938) and The Four Feathers (Zoltan Korda 1939) provide a much easier textual terrain for affirming colonialist discourses than when black characters are located inside Britain.<sup>174</sup>

Nevertheless the Stateside and European success of ...Henry VIII catapulted Korda to celebrity status. Hitherto his career had been in something of a trough. Before arriving in Britain he had been working for Paramount at its foreign language films at Joinville, just outside Paris. These studios had been set up in 1929 in the wake of the conversion of film to sound. However, Hollywood's foreign language films went into decline after 1931 as dubbing technology developed and achieved rapid acceptance by audiences.<sup>175</sup> This led to Paramount switching Korda to Britain for quota production. The fact that Korda was being moved around Europe is itself an indication that his brief career in Hollywood had not been an entirely happy one. He had largely failed to make his mark during a three year contract with First National and in 1930 Fox cancelled their contract with him after just one film.<sup>176</sup> In 1934 Korda reflected that during his time in the

<sup>169</sup> C. A. Leuene, 'The Private Lives of London Films' in Nash's Pall Mall Magazine December 1936/January 1937, p.112.

<sup>170</sup> C. A. Lejeune, *ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> M. Dickinson and S. Street, *op.cit.*, p.86.

<sup>172</sup> R. Bergan, The United Artists Story Octopus Books, London, 1986, p.54.

<sup>173</sup> Film Weekly, Sep. 7th, 1934, p.8.

<sup>174</sup> L. Young, Fear of The Dark 'Race' Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema Routledge, London, 1996, pp.55-56.

<sup>175</sup> K. Thompson, Exporting Entertainment *op.cit.*, p.162.

<sup>176</sup> Film Dope, no.31 January 1985, p.20.

Hollywood studio system, only one film, another historical epic, The Private Life of Helen of Troy suggested any kind of model or “vision” (his word) for subsequent work. While admiring the technical quality and high production values of Hollywood, Korda could not accustom himself to the subordination of the director to the mass production routines of filmmaking,<sup>177</sup> Hollywood’s producers and even its stars.<sup>178</sup> Korda was not cut out for American modernity nor could he see film’s of genuine worth emerging from the Hollywood film factory. After the success of ...Henry VIII Korda saw an opportunity in the imagery of British colonial history and European aristocracy to combine Hollywood’s spectacular production values with some resonance of ‘culture’ and ‘quality’ filmmaking.

Korda’s own biographical history as something of a traveller without a permanent ‘home’ encouraged his ‘internationalist’ ambitions for British cinema. I have suggested that ...Henry VIII may be viewed as a response to the new forms and dynamics of political rule and power that were emerging in Europe. Korda had first hand experiences of these upheavals that were sweeping across Europe. In 1919 - the year of the Hungarian Revolution - Korda was a major force in the Hungarian film industry, owning both a production company and a film studio. After the overthrow of Bela Kun’s short lived experiment in communism, the counter revolutionary regime eyed Korda’s pragmatic and tangential associations with Kun’s regime with suspicion. Fearing for his life, he fled Hungary to become something of a wandering exile, experiencing cinema as an international medium as he travelled and worked in Vienna, Berlin, Paris and Hollywood. In Britain he was to set up his own film company - rather than be a contract director - and one which was not a Fordist factory so much as a family firm. Such working practices (an echo once more of the organic community) were later reproduced more famously by Michael Balcon at Ealing Studios.<sup>179</sup> Just as the Jewish emigres who became studio bosses in Hollywood assimilated to WASP culture with a “pathological embrace of America”<sup>180</sup> so Korda

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<sup>177</sup> J. Staiger, “Blueprints for Feature Films: Hollywood’s Continuity Scripts” in The American Film Industry (ed) T. Balio, op.cit. pp.173-192.

<sup>178</sup> see Film Weekly, Sep. 7th 1934, p.7.

<sup>179</sup> C. Barr, Ealing Studios Studio Vista, London, 1993 esp. chapters 3 and 4.

See also John Ellis ‘Made in Ealing’ Screen vol.16, no.1, 1975, esp. pp.91-107.

<sup>180</sup> Neal Gabler, An Empire of Their Own, How The Jews Invented Hollywood Crown Publishers, New York, 1988, p.4.

appropriated the role of English gentleman with relish.<sup>181</sup> But perhaps in the early stages of assimilation, Korda retained the fresh eye of the newly arrived emigre, and was more alert to the 'constructed' quality of Englishness than later, when time and incorporation may naturalise what had once seemed an ideological performance.

Following the success of ...Henry VIII there was huge optimism that a critical turning point had been reached. Kinematograph Weekly noted on its front page, the prospects for a "tremedous improvement in British production." The same issue of the magazine also reported Korda cementing his ties with United Artists (via Douglas Fairbanks Snr). This committed London Films and United Artists to make 6-8 films annually costing on average £100,000. United Artists would be in charge of marketing and distributing the films in America. Production on two films, Catherine The Great and The Private Life of Don Juan was reported to be already underway.<sup>182</sup> With such a distribution deal apparently offering access to the American market, with legislation offering some protection of British films in the British market and with the critical and commercial success of ...Henry VIII Korda was able to persuade the Prudential Assurance Company to invest in his production programme as well as build the new Denham Studios.<sup>183</sup>

Korda was not the only producer aiming for success in the international and especially the American market. Herbert Wilcox ploughed another furrow in large scale historical films for British and Dominions Film Corporation (also distributed by United Artists) while Michael Balcon as director of production at Gaumont-British was claiming that British studios could conquer the international market.<sup>184</sup> Korda certainly hoped to make Hollywood's economic power work for him rather than against him. For example, upon the formation of London Films, Korda signed up young unknown players such as Robert Donat, Binnie Barnes, and Merle Oberon. Korda hoped to increase the value of his assets after the success of ...Henry

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<sup>181</sup> M. Korda, Charmed Lives Allen Lane, London, 1980.

<sup>182</sup> Kinematograph Weekly, August 24, 1933, p.1.

<sup>183</sup> According to Michael Korda the Prudential's profits were so huge at that time that they had £1 million to invest a week. The British Government, concerned that they may invest abroad encouraged them to direct some of their surplus into the British Film Industry. See M. Korda, Charmed Lives op.cit. p.106.

<sup>184</sup> Picturegoer, January, 26th 1935, p.26.

VIII by loaning his players to Hollywood studios, so that they would return to make films for him as stars with a higher profile in the American market place. <sup>185</sup>

This contrasts interestingly with producer Basil Dean at Associated Talking Pictures, who argued for 'national' productions. As part of this policy, Dean urged that British acting talent be protected from Hollywood by forming a repertory company that would produce film versions of successful plays. Dean's claim that the "theatre is the finest training ground possible for the screen" <sup>186</sup> was part of a general attempt to construct a 'quality' cinema rooted in British theatrical and literary traditions. Dean was criticised by the magazine Film Weekly for his subordination of cinema to other mediums. <sup>187</sup> Dean's alternative to Hollywood and the 'international' British film was always unlikely to win over mass audiences, for whom the thought of having the hegemony of middle class values reconfirmed in their own leisure time, was understandably unattractive. Yet Dean did have a sober view of the deeper dynamics underpinning the 'alliance' between sectors of Hollywood and organisations such as London Films. Dean did not shirk from calling Hollywood 'the enemy' and offered a succinct reason why:

"Hollywood producers realise that their continued success depends on their ability to control the film market in the English speaking world." <sup>188</sup>

As I have argued, Hollywood's global dominance rested on the oligopolistic control of its own home market. It was precisely that control which had been shaken by the Wall Street Crash. Major studios such as Warner, Fox, RKO and Paramount lost millions of dollars in the early 1930s. <sup>189</sup>

Kinematograph Weekly reported in 1933 that Hollywood's gross revenues

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<sup>185</sup> Film Weekly, Mar 7, 1936, p.16-17. This was not a hugely successful strategy. Donat had a minor role in The Count of Monte Cristo (Rowland Lee, 1934) before returning to make The Ghost Goes West (Rene Clair, 1935) while Binnie Barnes only returned from America to make one more film for Korda, The Divorce of Lady X in 1938. Barnes did not return from America a star. Oberon was slightly more successful in having a main role in William Wyler's These Three (1936).

<sup>186</sup> Film Weekly, May 4th, 1934, p.64.

<sup>187</sup> A. Higson, Waving The Flag op.cit., p.114.

<sup>188</sup> B. Dean, Film Weekly May 4th, 1934, p.64.

<sup>189</sup> T. Balio, The American Film Industry op.cit., pp. 255-256. Warner lost \$8 million in 1931, Fox \$3 million, RKO went into a \$5.6 million deficit, Paramount saw a 33 per cent drop in profits in 1931 and a massive \$21 million deficit by 1932.

had declined by a massive 45% since 1930, that weekly attendances were down by 28% and admission charges down by 25%.<sup>190</sup> However the paper also noted that the slump appeared to have bottomed out and that revenues were starting to rise. Thus ...Henry VIII had a double advantage. It exploits the gaps that had opened up in the American market as the economic crisis deepened. There was a desperate need for product. Exhibitors had shortened runs for pictures the moment interest fell away and were also shifting to double features to attract audiences back into the cinemas. According to Balio, even the largest exhibition chains had to “forage around in the independent field for pictures.”<sup>191</sup> It was exactly this field which U.A. catered to. At the same time ...Henry VIII entered the market *after* the slump, catching the ‘up’ moment in this ‘boom-bust’ cycle.

Whatever the film’s particular qualities as a text - and it is a peculiarly hybrid film - the success of ...Henry VIII depends at least in part on its propitious timing. Yet my analysis implies that this ‘window of opportunity’ may be a strictly limited one. For as Hollywood recovers and revenues rise, so the prospect of foreign penetration and competition (no matter how small) becomes more unacceptable and the need to reestablish total control over the market becomes more urgent. There were already signs that this was the case in 1933. Kinematograph Weekly reported a suggestion by Abram Myers, chairman of the small exhibitors Allied States Association, that foreign films should be excluded entirely from American markets. According to the paper, “Myers’ action had the support of a number of leading figures in the American film business”<sup>192</sup> However the threat of reprisal from other countries more dominated by American film than vice-versa convinced industry bosses that the proposal could lead to reprisals and be counter-productive. Yet the issue of foreign penetration of Hollywood remained a sensitive one. In 1934 Picturegoer reported a rumour that Hollywood studios were considering banning ‘foreign’ film stars in order to give American talent more opportunities.<sup>193</sup>

Such examples point to that conflict of interest which Dean argued existed between Hollywood and the British film industry. It should be noted that

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<sup>190</sup> Kinematograph Weekly, August 24, 1933, p.5.

<sup>191</sup> T. Balio, Grand Design op.cit., p.27.

<sup>192</sup> Kinematograph Weekly, ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Picturegoer, May 5th, 1934, p.23.

while Korda's deal with United Artists was immensely valuable, U.A. had in turn to negotiate distribution deals with the Hollywood majors in order to get Korda's films into the best picturehouses in the big urban areas. Yet only around 40 theatres in the United States played foreign films exclusively and only about 200 played foreign films occasionally.<sup>194</sup> Not only Korda's policy, but the international ambitions of many British productions during the 1930s were predicated on getting access to the American market. Maurice Kann, an American writer sceptical of long term British prospects in the American market suggested that American exhibitors would always take a mediocre American film rather than a mediocre British film simply because the former at least articulated the cultural values and idioms close to the audience.<sup>195</sup> Despite these economic and cultural obstacles, British production companies borrowed more than £4 million from the City in 1936.<sup>196</sup> The City's historic and chronic tendency to offer short term loans at high rates of interest<sup>197</sup> further cut into the film industry's profit and re-investment margins.<sup>198</sup> In 1937-38 a total of 228 films were produced. But with British films enjoying so little of the international market, this output had to make their returns in an increasingly overcrowded domestic market where American domination remained close to 80%.<sup>199</sup> Inevitably a slump followed the British boom in film production.<sup>200</sup> Korda's London Films survived but he lost control of Denham studios to the Prudential. Korda concluded in 1938 that "[t]he American market has not been captured to the extent some of us had hoped."<sup>201</sup> He argued rather lamely that the only solution was to make "better" films. However, under the exigencies of war, judgements concerning the 'quality' film were to shift largely towards the small scale film, with a contemporary setting and British mise-en-scene.

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<sup>194</sup> T. Balio, Grand Design op.cit., p.34.

<sup>195</sup> M. Kann, 'Hollywood and Britain - Three Thousand Miles Apart' in Footnotes to the Film (ed) C. Davy, Lovat Dickson Ltd/Readers' Union Ltd, London 1938, pp.199-200.

<sup>196</sup> T. Balio, Grand Design op.cit., p.134.

<sup>197</sup> W. Hutton, The State We're In Johnathan Cape, London, 1995, pp.159-160

<sup>198</sup> T. Aldgate, 'Comedy, Class and Containment: The British Domestic Cinema of the 1930s.' in British Cinema History op. cit., p.263.

<sup>199</sup> K. Thompson, Exporting Entertainment op.cit., p.165.

<sup>200</sup> G. Perry, 'The Great British Picture Show: Boomtime and Slumptime' in Popular Culture: Past and Present (eds) B. Waites, T. Bennett and G. Martin. Open University/Routledge, London, 1993, p.158.

<sup>201</sup> A. Korda, 'British Films: Today and Tomorrow' in Footnotes to the Film (ed) C. Davy, op.cit., p.167.



## **The Private Life of Henry VIII**

I want the following textual analysis to identify concretely how many of the constitutive elements of British film culture that I have been discussing, are mobilised in an actual film. One of the issues here is why exactly Hollywood films appealed more consistently to British audiences than British films. We have seen that there are industrial and economic determinants at work, but there are also cultural determinants as well. It is not that the cultural ingredients that constitute British Film culture were irredeemably unpopular. ...Henry VIII demonstrates that these elements could be mobilised in a way that was popular. But we shall also see that just as the economic conditions for success have always been short term for British cinema, its cultural make-up also offered impediments to mobilising a consistently popular cinema, especially at the 'quality' end of the market. Mass Observation research into Bolton's cinema audiences in the late 1930s showed a cross class preference for American films but a consistently higher preference for American films and a lower preference for British films amongst working class patrons.<sup>202</sup> Linked to this issue of the popular and popularity is that conception of 'the people' known as the organic community. How is this ideologeme inscribed into the very building blocks of cinematic language: its conceptions of space and time, *mise en scene* and narrative structure? How does the organic community influence the economy of spectatorship in British cinema? What are the modes of identification it offers and refuses? How secure is this economy of spectatorship? Where are the fissures and contradictions through which the spectator may access pleasures and meanings against the 'grain' of the text?

The central protagonist of the film, Henry, represents, in anthropomorphic form, the antinomies of the organic community (O.C.1 and O.C.2). Henry is the key signifier of desire, licensing the desires of those around him. This is evident in an early scene where the King's Nurse and the ladies of the court gather around the Royal bed. The size and prominence of the bed in the scene, the dialogue around what the King looks like in bed, the action of the Nurse in pushing one of the women's hands under the sheets and declaring that the bed is still warm, amounts to a surprising foregrounding of what is going to be repressed in so much 'quality' British cinema as it

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<sup>202</sup> J. Richards and D. Sheridan, Mass-Observation At The Movies Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1987, p.34.

was to develop: desire. Few British screen characters have managed to disarticulate so completely the connection between the dominant classes and the repression of desire as this film does; and this disarticulation which depends on Henry as a fantasy condensation of aristocratic and plebeian class identities, rather more than the film's epic pretensions, is perhaps the strongest evidence of Hollywood/American influence.

Yet if Henry licenses desire and is himself intensely desiring, he is also the agent of the Law, of social control and as such he represents the social fetters of the ideologeme of the organic community, its class and gendered relations, its freezing of desire and curtailment of fantasy. For the film begins with an act of patriarchal power: Anne Boleyn's execution on the charge of adultery, and it will end with another female death for the same reason. Yet initially at least, these two contradictory components of the ideologeme (desire and the Law) are reconciled in the film, although the ideological stresses involved in performing this trick are symptomatically evident in the sudden tonal shifts between comedy to tragedy, as the whole society prepares for Boleyn's execution. And yet in these opening scenes, Henry is at his most powerful, his most hegemonic; it is his patriarchal command around which everything turns, even, and perhaps particularly, when he is absent from the *mise en scene*.

An important sign of Henry's hegemonic reach early on are the scenes which portray the crowds gathering to watch the execution, the spectacle of power. Here the film shifts towards comedy to diffuse criticism of Henry. "I do feel so sorry for her" declares a woman, before asking someone in front of her to take her hat off because she cannot see the block. This combination of apparent concern swiftly replaced by brutish desire exactly reproduces the Leavisite complaint concerning the power of commercialised spectacle and the false emotions of sentimentality. Significantly, this is located in the women and reinforced by her demand after the execution for a new dress, like the one worn by Anne Boleyn. The link between consumerism and women was to be extensively forged of course in the British New Wave of the 1960s. But a forerunner to such figures as the castrating mother-in-law in A Kind of Loving is glimpsed here.<sup>203</sup> This is further underlined when she slaps her husband's face after he suggests that she can have a new dress,

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<sup>203</sup> J. Hill, 'Working-class realism and Sexual Reaction: Some Theses on the British 'New Wave' in British Cinema History op.cit., p.308 .

but only for *her* execution. The brief moment of male rebellion, swiftly and physically crushed, also connects this comedic scene to the Carry On films that were to be so popular several decades later. 204

The next scene is an interior shot which introduces us to Anne Boleyn. The camera tracks back as she walks screen right to the window. The film begins with the execution of a character which will have no consequences for the subsequent narrative. From the point of view of the classical narrative, the entire opening is largely redundant. This narrative redundancy (unthinkable in a Hollywood film for decades) is reflected in this scene which has Anne on her own (no character interaction to reveal important information regarding the narrative) and performing no significant action on her own. The next scene, also an interior shot, introduces us to the whistling executioner who is sharpening his sword. Then we cut to the ladies of the court. They are discussing Anne Boleyn's fate as they unpick her insignia from the pillows and sheets and replace them with Jane Seymour's. Katherine Howard insists that it is no laughing matter. The film however is torn and insists on offering some laughs for the spectator. It does this by returning to the afore mentioned executioner. There is an Elizabethan/Jacobean dramatic structure here with the comic interludes to the historical tragedy, largely being left to the 'low' characters. Having noted the executioner's incongruous pride in his grisly work, the scene then develops a rivalry between the executioner, who it transpires is French, and his English help. For he too is an executioner and complains bitterly about the job going to a foreigner "when half the English executioners are out of work as it is" (an obvious allusion to contemporary hardships and debates about protectionism).

The opening of the film thus works by *dispersing* the narrative across a *community* of characters, many of them lowly functionaries commenting upon the making of 'history' as it unfolds. There is a concentration on small details such as the executioner sharpening his sword, the women of the court sewing Anne Boleyn out of Henry's life. In a later scene the King's guards prepare the Royal bedchamber for Henry and Jane's nuptial night. We see the guards thrust their swords under the bed in a ritualistic making safe procedure. This accumulation of detail, the focus on the minutia and the quotidian evokes an extraordinary density of social determinations on

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<sup>204</sup> M. Jordan, 'Carry On...Follow that Stereotype' in British Cinema History op. cit., pp.312-327.

the individual characters, cementing them in place. Indeed, despite the film's historical genre, this is no epic: the film is extraordinarily *domestic* in scope. In terms of narrative structure, the film's realist chronotope <sup>205</sup> appears to be interested in distributing or spreading time into a variety of different spaces. The film has been composed of short scenes organised around a 'still' point in the narrative (Anne Boleyn's imminent execution) rather than a rigorous unfolding of linear time. The integrated and unified social relations imagined in the organic community are manifest in the social (rather than plot) interconnectedness of all the characters while at the same time, internal conflicts within the community are substantially muted by comedy and script. Even Anne Boleyn, contemplating death, neither says or does anything antagonistic.

The checking and breaking up of narrative time is precisely what allows a community of characters to enter the frame. Later on in the film we twice 'visit' the kitchen staff whose only role is to offer commentary on the King's predicament and on male and female relationships rather than forward the narrative action. Likewise, the King's barber appears twice to offer Henry advice on whether to marry again or not. One is reminded here of Leavis and Thompson's comments on the 'premodern' relations between employers and employees: that they were bound together around a shared anxiety to "maintain the standards and reputation of the firm", the 'firm' being in this instance, the monarchy.<sup>206</sup> Such 'lowly' characters function as screen surrogates for the spectator, as if they must gain access to the text, at least partially, via a picture of a complete society in which they are encouraged to recognise their class position in the social hierarchy.

Sue Harper has argued that in the early 1930s historical dramas tended to construct an alliance (distinct from Adorno's constellation between the 'old' and the 'new') between aristocracy and proletariat 'against' the bourgeoisie, a radicalism made possible by the wider context of economic crisis. <sup>207</sup> Such an alliance was implicit in John Ruskin's literature a century earlier (as long as labour also rejected modernity, particularly socialism). Certainly the bourgeoisie are absent from ...Henry VIII which opens the way in turn

<sup>205</sup> M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' in The Dialogic Imagination University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981, pp.84-258.

<sup>206</sup> F.R. Leavis and D. Thompson, op.cit., p.75.

<sup>207</sup> S. Harper, 'Studying Popular Taste, British historical films in the 1930s' in Popular European Cinema (eds) R. Dyer and G. Vincendeau Routledge, London, 1992. p.101-111.

for the sexual permissiveness and bi-gender perspectives of the film. This may in part account for the popularity of the film in a particular historical context. However we should also note exactly where desire is located as an indication of the kind of impediments which a long term popular British cinema would have to overcome. The various working class characters who comment on the King are not articulating their own desires and ambitions, so much as talking about the desires and ambitions of Henry.

Audience research, such as that conducted by Mass Observation, suggests that 1930s audiences had contradictory desires. On the one hand there was a comparatively high priority given to the question asking whether audiences wanted to see “more people like you and I”. However, this apparently ‘realist’ desire was combined with strong inclinations towards utopianism, evident in the high priority given to the question asking audiences whether they would like to see more “beautiful things” in films.

<sup>208</sup> The cultural hegemony of Hollywood, it seems to me, rests on its ability to reconcile these seemingly contradictory audience desires; portraying characters that appear vernacular, “like you and I” while also being located in settings and with a sensibility that suggests mobility, change, dynamicism - all the qualities 1930s audiences appreciated in American films. In class terms, Hollywood’s heroes and heroines are fantasy condensations of class identities and possibilities. In The Private Lives Of Elizabeth and Essex (Michael Curtiz, US, 1939) for example, the film opens with Essex’s triumphal return from war. The people line the streets, again the spectators of history. But there is no delineation of them; the film is supremely uninterested in these people “like you and I” but instead solicits the spectator to leap frog over the crowd and identify directly at the point at which all the film’s energy is directed: the vernacular hero (Errol Flynn) who is no mere spectator of history, but its causal agent.

If Henry has some of the qualities of the hero typical of Hollywood cinema, he is embedded in a very different web of narrative strategies. For one thing, it is not until scene nine that Henry makes his appearance. We have returned to the ladies of the court who are dutifully removing evidence of Anne Boleyn’s insignia (her social and sexual status) from the bedsheets. Katherine Howard (Binnie Barnes) is sticking up for Anne’s virtue and is on the verge of saying something indiscreet about Henry when he enters the

<sup>208</sup> J. Richards and D. Sheridan, op.cit., pp.34-38.

film. It is a most undramatic entrance. He is both being “talked down” by one of the characters (“if the King were not a King I would call him a...”) and initially he is unacknowledged by the women. This marks a huge contrast with the construction of Essex in the Curtiz film. After Henry makes his presence known (“what would you call me?” he asks) the subsequent dialogue revolves around court gossip rather than narrative action. Henry’s appearance is further diminished by the long shot which ushers him into our gaze while he is framed and contained standing still between the heavy columns of an arch.

Such static use of camera, performer and mise en scene has been seen as one of the persistent failings of British cinema and evidence of its entrapment within a theatrical and literary heritage which pays scant attention to visual dynamics.<sup>209</sup> Yet its meaning here is quite precise. While a number of commentators have noted how the film charts Henry’s “decline into dotage”<sup>210</sup> and ‘impotence’<sup>211</sup> his rather bathetic entrance indicates that his fall is not from such a great height after all. The first shot of Henry diminishes him to the extent that it asserts the institution of the monarchy over individual agency. This is anticipated by the opening shot of the film which frames the battlements of the castle through an archway. There are no people in this shot, for what the film is celebrating here is the accumulated weight of the past. Already we can detect the signs that Henry, as agent of the law, will subordinate his own desires to the good/continuity of the social order: his sexual role, his advisors will remind him, is procreative (thus ensuring dynastic continuity), the very antithesis of the pleasure principle. Visually, Henry’s entrance into the text captures the tension between Henry as agent of the law (the threat he poses to Katherine) and as subordinate to it.

Research into 1930s British audiences can provide some empirical anchorage to my speculations about the spectator positions of offer. Here is an extract from a research team headed by Annette Kuhn which illustrates how performance codes and language were strong indicators of class boundaries in British films and classlessness in American films.

<sup>209</sup> J. Petley, “Reaching For The Stars” in British Cinema Now BFI, London, 1985, p.122

<sup>210</sup> Time Out Film Guide. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1993, p.561.

<sup>211</sup> M. Landy, British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1991, p.82.

"Harrow, England, 25 July 1995.

NP=Nancy Prudhoe, born 1913. NC= Nancy Carrington, born 1911.

EH= Elsie Horne, born 1908. VB= Valentina Bold (interviewer).

Transcribed by Joan Simpson. | indicates simultaneous speech.

VB: [You were saying about] the English.

NP: About the English people.

VB: Actors

NC: Oh yeh

NP: Yeh. Well the English actors, they'd stand there an say it. Where as the Americans [**pause: 1 second**] well they're just natural, aren't they?

EH: That's right.

NC: Natural Mmm. Yeh.

NP: When the, the American language,

EH: Well the language is no different but they instead, they've got a different. what shall I call it um, they speak but when they speak it sounds different.

NP: They put it over differently, you know, the English are more likely to stann there and sort of say it. [**mimes stiff movements**]

NC: Mm.

NP: Whereas the American, they do the actions an. [**mimes fluid gestures**].

....

NP: I think the English people are a bit.

NC: Snooty.

VB: **Mm.**

NP: Yes. Yes, they're not. Whereas the American, they speak differently an they ACT differently.

NC: Yeh.

NP: They're more free with their actions, I think.

**Tape T95-101 'Cinema Culture in 1930s Britain'].** " 212

Here language and performance codes in Hollywood films resonate a

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<sup>212</sup> A. Kuhn, V. Bold, 'Cinematic Regressions: Memories of Picture Going in the 1930s' Paper given at Screen Studies Conference, Glasgow , 29th June 1996.

directness, a utopian energy, a liberation from what is literally conceived of as a physically restricting environment. Henry's static entrance into the film, hands on hips, could not be a clearer example of this encoding. These responses to the respective merits or otherwise of American and British screen acting are very much in line with the responses collected by Mass Observation.<sup>213</sup> We should also note that the coming of sound only served to underline the class basis of British acting talent, "while the racy vivacity of American slang quickly became a vital part of popular culture."<sup>214</sup>

Although Henry does subsequently advance towards the camera to dominate a low angle shot, this is largely a transitory moment of suspense vis-a-vis Katherine's indiscretion, rather than a sustained attempt to construct the kind of causal agency which is the norm in Hollywood cinema. This is underlined by his exit from the scene. While the scene has played a conventional narrative role in introducing Henry to his future wife, Katherine, his exit is not integrated into any plot development. The audience does not know where he is going as he exits the scene. There is no metonymic plot space awaiting his intervention. Again the effect is bathetic and contrasts strongly with Essex's linear unfolding of metonymic plot space which culminates with his arrival into Elizabeth's presence.

There are some political paradoxes that follow from this analysis if it has any general truths to be gleaned from it. I am suggesting that British film culture struggles to sustain a truly hegemonic (i.e. popular but incorporated) mode of address. Outside the middle class, British audiences do not easily find a point of self recognition on-screen, an image "like you and I" and when they do, it is an image divorced from the utopian capacity to change self and environment. Hollywood films fill this void and the implications of that will be discussed in the next chapter. Does this mean though that calls for a popular British cinema are in effect calls for a more effectively hegemonic British cinema? Possibly, but not necessarily. For there are elements in the British economy of cinematic spectatorship which may be utilised for more progressive possibilities.

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<sup>213</sup> J. Richards and D. Sheridan, op.cit., pp.41-135.

<sup>214</sup> R. Murphy, "A Rival To Hollywood? The British Film Industry In The Thirties" in *Screen*, vol.24, 4-5, 1983.



## **Class and Spectatorship**

One face of the organic community, underpinned by the film's narrative strategies requires the regulation of desire contrary to the mass audiences' experience of the pleasures offered by Hollywood. As I have argued, this stresses institutional and societal counterweights to Henry's causal agency and carnivalesque potential. The working class spectator is caught between identification with a character lacking causal agency and the passive position of their screen surrogates, the various spectators of history. This is not just a question of content, it must be emphasised, but of the film's mode of address, its economy of spectatorship.

Let us take as another example involving this time, the film's European aesthetic influences, while also suggesting other possible spectator positions. In the wrestling match scene, an ageing Henry, married to Katherine, displays his insecurities concerning his masculinity by challenging the court wrestler whom Katherine has suggested must be the strongest man in all England. Once again the episodic structure functions to undercut audience identification in the scene. There has been no narrative build up to the fight and it is hard to see what is at stake in narrative terms, in the outcome. Furthermore, the fight involves Henry in combat with a 'narrative nobody', a character we have not seen before nor will we meet again. Then there is the way that the scene is shot. Only five of the fight sequences fifteen shots are of the fight itself. Nor are there any point of view shots between Henry and the court wrestler, so that the spectator cannot be sutured into the combatants' space. The other ten shots (foregrounding the self reflexive aspects of the film) are of the screen characters watching the fight. This includes two court functionaries having (screen) time to comment on the King's vanity. Yet the scene is not incompetently or unpleasurably constructed. It draws on an arguably European propensity for formal and aesthetic contrasts. There is for example Vincent Korda's set design which makes expressionistic use of the shadows which the wrestlers cast on the wall behind the crowd so that the spectator watches the crowd watching the fight which is then projected back on a brick 'screen' behind them for our benefit. Then there is the rapid cutting in the scene which recalls the enthusiasm which Soviet filmmakers had for editing. Finally, there is the stark contrast between the silence of

the scene punctuated only by the exertions of the combatants.

Henry in fact wins the match (although he does nearly faint shortly afterwards) but the point is that the pleasures which the spectator is offered here are not those of vicarious gratification. How do we read this scene though in terms of spectator positions? It seems to me that there are two main possibilities. Peter Wagner's notion that in comparison to America, Europe's configuration of modernity can be defined as 'restricted' is useful here. If capitalist modernity promises self autonomy and self development, then in Europe's imagined communities, there are very specific boundaries to those open promises. We may read into the cinematic language of the scene just described, precisely this sense of a structured social space in which everyone (from monarch to plebeian) has their place. The regulation of desire (including cinematic identification) is thus symptomatic of the restricted modernity that characterises British/European culture.

However, I suggested earlier that against Hollywood's unswerving attempts to align the spectator to the heroic character(s) of the film, perhaps British cinema has cultural roots which can be inflected to offer a more complex mode of identification. The reining in of vicarious gratification and the emphasis in the scene on assessing the personal and political implications of the fight by foregrounding it as spectacle, has quasi-Brechtian implications. Laughton was indeed to become close friends with Bertolt Brecht during the 1940s when they were both working in Hollywood. Together they collaborated on, rewrote and staged Brecht's Galileo. Brecht was attracted to Laughton's acting style precisely because he detected in it elements of his own approach to acting. The didactic educational dimension to drama which Brecht held, meant that acting was not to be understood as an 'expression' of character, so much as a demonstration of human traits in specific circumstances.<sup>215</sup> Brecht might almost have written these lines with Laughton's performance in ...Henry VIII in mind:

"Egocentricity is fun for me if it is expressed vividly: essentially asocial traits such as cowardice, obsequiousness, brutality, when reduced to an aesthetic formula, even enrich me."<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> James K. Lyon, Bertolt Brecht In America Methuen, London, p.187.

<sup>216</sup> James K. Lyon, *ibid*, p.168.

Together with ...Henry VIII's mobilisation of *mise en scene*, editing and narrative structure, a space is opened up for the spectator to observe, with something approaching Brechtian dispassion, a mock-heroic Henry and his court's "asocial" traits: the spectacle of power is here presented for criticism.

### **Gender and Spectatorship**

Such internal tensions within the text are then compounded by the (financial) need to reach out into female audiences, inflecting the film towards the melodrama (the emphasis on private loves and feelings, affairs, liaisons and betrayals). If the organic community functions to put the breaks on modernity, to pull representation back to a more stable and unified past, to stress hierarchical social cohesion over individual wishes, then female desire is always likely to be a disruptive force. But of course desire is precisely what capitalism requires to fuel consumption. This contradiction between ideologies based on tradition and economics based on the revolutionary transformation of desire reverberates through out the world of mass culture. For example, Rappaport has discussed how, for women, the liberatory aspects of shopping were being actively constructed by British retailers and advertisers. The 1909 opening of Selfridges in London's West End was an important catalyst in the shift towards a representation of shopping as a social and cultural occasion.<sup>217</sup> There were tensions however within such representations and discourses between shopping as integral to family life and as an escape from its dull routines.<sup>218</sup> For once desire is tapped, then the acceptable social roles for women (the mother figure as represented by the mistress nurse, the consumer as represented by the spectator at Anne Boleyn's funeral) may become fetters to aspirations of increasing social and sexual independence (e.g. Katherine and Anne of Cleves who tricks Henry into giving her freedom and indeed, her man).

This contradiction is inscribed into the feminine economy of the melodrama's consumption, where, according to Sue Harper, aspects of *mise en scene*, particularly costume, function as repositories of desire, excess and

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<sup>217</sup> E. D. Rappaport " ' A New Era of Shopping:' The Promotion of Women's Pleasure in London's West End, 1904-1914. " in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (eds) L. Charney and V.R. Schwartz, UCP, Berkeley, 1995, pp.130-131.

<sup>218</sup> Rappaport, *ibid*, p.146.

subversion.<sup>219</sup> In particular, Harper argues that the visual language of Gainsborough melodramas contradicts the stern morality of the scripts.<sup>220</sup> Something similar can be detected in the way dress and performance codes in *...Henry VIII* tell the viewer how mismatched Katherine and Henry are and how much more compatible, despite the betrayals involved, Thomas Culpeper and Katherine are. When Henry first tries to seduce Katherine, visiting her room, she is dressed in a bonnet which covers her hair; she has collars that cover her neck and meet her unrevealing high cut dress whilst her shoulders are concealed behind padded and puffed material. In performance terms the body language is always of Henry trying to dominate her, symbolised by his crushing, smothering embrace.

By contrast, the dress and performance codes deployed in representing Katherine's affair with Culpeper are quite different. When Culpeper (Robert Donat) visits her bedchamber, Katherine is dressed in the soft silks of her bed clothes. Instead of a bonnet, Katherine wears a thin braid in her otherwise exposed hair. Her neck is visible, her dress low cut (accentuated by a high angle shot as she sits). Part of the top of her back is exposed by the cut of her dress which hugs her waist, buttocks and legs much more closely than the formal wear previously discussed. This scene resonates sensuality despite the fact that the script is fatalistic, doom laden and full of hints of their imminent destruction. Certainly Katherine's costume is historically incongruous and would have been dismissed by C.R. Beard as more evidence of "hotch-pot" history, but as Harper argues in relation to Gainsborough melodramas, this "chaotic amalgam" presents "the historical past as a site of sensual pleasure...neither regular and linear, nor 'closed'."<sup>221</sup> The performance codes between the two characters are also very different from the earlier scene with Henry. Initially, Culpeper comes to say goodbye, determined to end the affair by leaving the court. Katherine sits while he stands over her. Then Culpeper hides as Henry comes to bid Katherine goodnight (his love for Katherine is already becoming increasingly platonic). After he has gone, Katherine enters the ante-chamber to find Culpeper sitting distraught where Katherine had been. She moves towards him, lifts his face, bends down and kisses him. Thus their love is not only more

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<sup>219</sup> S. Harper, 'Historical Pleasures' in *Home is Where the Heart is* (ed) C. Gledhill, BFI, London, 1987 pp.167-196.

<sup>220</sup> S. Harper, *ibid*, p.178.

<sup>221</sup> S. Harper, *ibid*, pp.180-181

passionate but more equal than Katherine's relationship to the domineering Henry.

The contradiction between the visual and verbal languages of the text, raises the question of reading the past 'against the grain', as Benjamin put it. Benjamin linked the decline of a single, unitary imposition of meaning - one of the characteristics of what he called auratic art - with the rise of mass movements and new technologies of reproduction. He saw film as the key agent of change in this regard and that the "liquidation of the traditional value of cultural heritage" was, he argued, "most palpable in the great historical films."<sup>222</sup> This certainly provides a radically different take on the genre than offered by either the positivism of a C. R. Beard or the ideological affirmations of a Philip Lindsay.

## Conclusion

I began this chapter by mapping the historical context of ...Henry VIII, noting the conflicting political responses to the economic crisis. The constellation of the aristocracy and Henry VIII with this context of crisis and change, mediates this wider political ambivalence, most notably in the dialectic of desire and the Law within Henry himself and how that plays out in class and gender terms. In class terms, we have both a hierarchical society and an anti-bourgeois, plebeian sensibility. In gender terms we have Patriarchal Law and its feminisation, we have female desire and its partial disarticulation from a conventional, constrained femininity.

The film sits at the intersection of disparate, transnational cultural currents, themselves open to a certain semiotic pliability in terms of spectatorship. Its key endogenous cultural resource is the ideologeme of the organic community. I traced its roots from feudalism, the primal scene of capitalism, to its subsequent reconfiguration as an image that both legitimises a hierarchically ordered society while also offering a critique of capitalism. I discussed how the organic community flourished at the expense of a popular modernism to be found in Hollywood/American culture and an avant-garde Modernism to be found in European culture. The organic community functioned in the work of many writers - not least

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<sup>222</sup> W. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Illuminations (ed) H. Arendt, Pimlico Books, London, 1999, p.215.

Leavis and Thompson - as a way of writing historiography, sociology and cultural evaluation. The ambivalence of the organic community vis-a-vis capitalism and class division reflects, I suggested, the class position of the middle class intelligentsia. On the one hand they want to preserve their specialised role as cultural professionals, the source of their cultural capital, their distinction from the masses (hence the attractiveness of the ideologeme's hierarchical structure) on the other hand they became increasingly at odds with the pure exercise of crude economic power and criteria which characterised *laissez-faire* because that left little room for the value of culture and their cultural expertise.

However, if the organic community is ambivalent on the question of class, it is rather less so, at least in the 1930s, on the question of gender. It is an unashamedly male dominated community and it is no surprise to find in the work of Leavis and Thompson and D.H. Lawrence, women being conflated with the organic community's other *bête noir*, mass culture, consumerism and fantasy. Precisely because ...Henry VIII is a film however, and therefore has a close proximity to mass culture, consumerism and fantasy, means that it does have a contradictory gender politics. If Henry VIII is caught between O.C. 1 and O.C. 2, the women all come across as very modern in their personal and political ambitions. They seem more caught between Henry's patriarchal command (O.C. 2) and the promises of modernity (M.1).

The aesthetic dimension of the organic community gave a particularly high value to traditionalism and an empirical realism. The mediation of these discourses into film and film culture meant that ...Henry VIII was the ur-text of the "quality" film. However, unlike the organic community in Leavis and Thompson's work, film culture displayed a greater openness to some strands of cinematic Modernism while also covertly adopting the classical narrative popularised by Hollywood, but given a British twist by its traditionalism and empirical components and its domesticating impulses. This complex of international cultural exchanges - evident in ...Henry VIII - was largely missed in the film's critical reception. Its hybridity was suppressed as critics desperately tried to locate it exclusively within one geo-cultural formation, be it Hollywood/America, British or European.

I then turned to the context of production in order to remind us of the material determinants acting on the film. This context is characterised chiefly by an uneasy balance between co-operation and competition with Hollywood and subordination to its economic power mixed with aspirations to make inroads into its home market. I explored Korda's attempts to negotiate these unequal power relations. We saw that the capacity to produce films according to Korda's strategy - big budget historical dramas aimed at the American market, the ur-text of overblown British ambitions ever since - was strictly temporary as a viable strategy.

Nevertheless, in ...Henry VIII Korda has left us with a film that does preserve an extraordinarily complex political, cultural and socio-economic moment. My textual analysis has tried to locate its potential meanings around a historically grounded analysis of class and gendered spectatorship. This required an engagement with the issue of a progressive popular culture which British cinema has had a fraught relationship to, not least because of the way traditionalism and empirical realism have put the breaks on change and desire. However, my analysis of the film has attempted, in Benjamin's words, to "wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it"<sup>223</sup> revealing the signs of crisis and change which are going on beneath the surface.

I am not claiming that ...Henry VIII is representative of all British films in the 1930s, still less British film generally, but it does draw from a common semantic resource, from which films have to wrestle with both the strengths and weaknesses of the culture. Perhaps this is best illustrated by comparison with a film made at the other end of the historical spectrum of study. Made over sixty-five years later, Monk Dawson (Tom Waller 1997) illustrates the weaknesses of the semantic resource from the perspective of constructing a popular film culture. The central character, rather like British cinema itself, tries but fails to escape from the parameters of his upper middle class milieu. These worlds, represented by the monastery and the rich London elite he falls into when he leaves the monastic order, enclose and contain him. In both cases he tries but fails to change these worlds from within. He is a mock-heroic figure, in stark contrast to a Hollywood hero, unable to radiate any utopian transformative effect on his environment or escape from it. Unlike Henry VIII, Dawson does not

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<sup>223</sup> W. Benjamin, "Theses on the philosophy of history" in Illuminations, *ibid.* p.247.

articulate any plebeian or vernacular cultural identity, but rather, like so many British heroes, he is sexually repressed and unfulfilled. For a 'mainstream' audience, there is little here to get excited about or to connect with. And yet the film also shows glimmers of how these cultural contours may be inflected in more interesting ways, politically. The mock-heroic character, as in ...Henry VIII, opens a reflective space for the spectator to assess the nature of the social determinations which are frustrating Dawson. In addition, the weakening of the strong causal agency typical of Hollywood, also opens up a narrative space for some unexpected voices. Thus, as a journalist, Dawson goes to Northern Ireland to interview a Catholic priest who espouses liberation theology, who has engaged with the people in a way Dawson fails to do (even his interview is spiked) and whose five minute presence offers a more cogent critique of the British involvement in Northern Ireland than many films ostensibly about 'the Troubles.' Of course, neither the revelation of social determination nor the presence of marginalised voices would automatically generate 'popular' appeal, but then that only foregrounds the political issues at stake in that word, and the theoretical and cultural work required to transform its meanings.



**Hollywood Futures  
And British Spectatorship  
In The 1980s**

"All workers are migrants in the industrial system, in search of rootedness, stability and sufficiency but constantly evicted, uprooted and moved on, condemned to learn afresh the bitter lessons of the imperative of solidarity and resistance."

- J. Seabrook. <sup>1</sup>

"...along with community and society, individuality itself may be melting into the modern air."

- Marshall Berman. <sup>2</sup>

In the previous chapter, I explored the relationship between a British text (albeit permeated with American and European cultural influences) and its context of reception. In this chapter I change the geo-cultural dynamics in order to explore globalisation and Anglo-American relations in more detail. Here we shall be looking into the relations between Hollywood films and their British context of reception. Historically, we have leapt from the decline of *laissez-faire* economics in the 1930s to their triumphant return in the 1980s.

In the previous chapter I used Walter Benjamin's concept of the constellation to redeem the utopian elements which The Private Life Of Henry VIII projected *back* into the Tudor past. These utopian elements, hostility to class hierarchy, the bourgeoisie and unequal relations of gender, have to be sifted out from the powerful evocations of the status quo, the continuity of the ruling classes and the unity of the social order, which are attached to historical images. The Hollywood science fiction films which I focus on in this chapter means that conversely, I want to explore the dialectic between utopianism and ideology which is to be found by projecting into the *fut-ur*. For Benjamin, ur-phenomena are those historical images in which the present reveals itself in earlier embryonic forms. <sup>3</sup> Thus, fut-ur phenomena by contrast reveals the present by unfolding its essential logic into a schematic yet-to-be. Nevertheless, we shall see that despite this emphasis on fut-ur phenomena, ur-phenomena are also embedded within these films. In particular, we will find the imagery of frontier capitalism (culled from the western genre) and an older manual industrial capitalism (e.g. mining) still operative. Ur and fut-ur images are

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<sup>1</sup> J. Seabrook, New Internationalist no.281, July 1996, p.22.

<sup>2</sup> M. Berma, All That Is Solid Melts Into Air Verso, London 1993, p.110.

<sup>3</sup> S. Buck-Morss, The Dialectics Of Seeing, Walter Benjamin And The Arcades Project MIT Press, Massachusetts, 1989, p.73.

the site of a complex meshing of desires, some of which intimate a transcendence of the social order based on commodity production and others which are ideologically complicit with that social order.

The textual contradictions of these films can be traced back to the distinction Benjamin made between the collective *unconscious* and the consciousness of the collective.<sup>4</sup> The former is a volcanic generator of wish images which seek to liberate use value from the shackles of exchange value. Such intimations of collectivity (*not* to be confused with homogeneity) can only force their way into actual expression (the consciousness of the collective) at the cost of considerable disguise, distortion and mutilation. As Buck-Morss notes, the Freudian unconscious defines the dream as “a (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish.”<sup>5</sup> The “dream” in this case may be both institutional structures, such as the nation and the family, fully as much as representations. In either case, the dream has been warped by relations of class domination. This is why the dreams or wish images of the collective unconscious are a site of expression *and* repression. It is this conflict for example that conservative and Conservative visions of collective identities and commonalities (e.g. the family, the nation) tap into and reconcile with the prevailing property relations. But even these social relations have been thrown into crisis with the ferocious return of *laissez-faire*.

Benjamin’s notion of the collective unconscious and the “dreaming” collective, is not uncontentious or without its dangers. Adorno’s response to a Benjamin manuscript on Baudelaire, is well known. As the editor of Aesthetics and Politics notes, Adorno took issue with the “psychologistic subjectivism” implied by the concept of the dream.<sup>6</sup> As we have seen however, Benjamin’s conception of the dream does not exist at the level of individual psychology, but at the level of social relations and forces of production which provide the materialist prerequisites for utopianism, or future dreaming, while also frustrating and blocking such anticipations of a better life. In fact, Adorno is the last person to throw the stones of orthodox materialism at anyone, given his own idealism. What really irked Adorno about the concept of the dream, I suggest, is less its apparent lack of

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<sup>4</sup> S. Buck-Morss, Dialectics Of Seeing, op.cit., p.118.

<sup>5</sup> S. Buck Morss, op.cit., p.282.

<sup>6</sup> R. Taylor, Aesthetics and Politics Verso, London, 1988, p.102.

objective materialism, than that it seemed to suggest a human agency and hopefulness which conflicted with Adorno's functionalism and pessimism. Thus Adorno wanted Benjamin to focus much more on the dialectical alter ego of the commodity world's utopianism, "the 19th century as Hell." <sup>7</sup> It was this duality of the commodity that Adorno wanted preserved: "consciousness or unconsciousness cannot simply depict it [the commodity] as a dream, but responds to it in equal measure with desire and fear." <sup>8</sup>

However, Benjamin's conception as a whole was in agreement with Adorno. He did not see the "dream" simply in positive terms, for the dream was also simultaneously, a nightmare. What this debate between Benjamin and Adorno illustrates once more is the difficulty in recognising the utopian and ideological dimensions of the commodity society and culture, simultaneously. Furthermore, one only has to think of a single fut-ur image, the transformation of nature via technology for example, to understand how this debate and the clarification of the concept of the "dream" which it affords, is extremely relevant to any contemporary discussion of the science fiction genre. For it is precisely the fear and desire, the meshing of utopian and dystopian currents running through the genre, which is so characteristic.

Adorno also took issue with the collective dimension to the dream, suggesting that the notion ran dangerously close to Jung's a-historical, mythic archetypes. "It should," Adorno wrote, "be a clear and sufficient warning that in a dreaming collective no differences remain between classes." <sup>9</sup> Yet everything depends on whether the "collective" is conceived in terms of encompassing the social totality, in which case, as in the organic community, class (and other) differences are powerfully muted; or whether the collective is conceived in a way which sharpens the antagonism between *different* social/collective interests. Benjamin's understanding of the dream as a site of class conflict, suggests the latter conception. The question of antagonism is a reminder that we need to be thinking of *collectives* and there are two which the science fiction films foreground: labour and capital, with a third group, the middle classes, negotiating the fraught space in between. Finally there is the question of the individual. This was Adorno's favoured

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<sup>7</sup> T. Adorno, "Letters to Walter Benjamin" in Aesthetics and Politics *ibid*, p.111.

<sup>8</sup> T. Adorno, *ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> T. Adorno, *ibid*, p.113.

category and one suspects the real source of his discomfort with Benjamin's emphasis on the collective. I suggested in the introduction that the concept of the collective unconscious does not eclipse the individual since the individual is, even and especially in its most privatised New Right manifestation "already a socially determined interest" (Marx)<sup>10</sup> What is at stake in the different theories and representations of the individual that we will encounter in this chapter, are different visions of the social order. Can the integrity and autonomy of the individual be maintained and what vision of the social order does that presuppose? What is the individual's relationship to collective conflicts? Is the individual being absorbed into the collective project of capital or is the old monadic subject on the cusp of being liberated by consumer capitalism? These are some of the issues to be addressed.

### **Anglo-American Culture**

Cinematic visions of the future from British *produced* film culture are as rare as visions of the past are the norm. They exist of course, for example, Shopping, (Paul Anderson, 1994) a teen-movie/science fiction hybrid starring a young Jude Law, and Welcome II The Terrordome (Ngozi Onwurah, 1993), a Black urban futuristic dystopia. Both were critical and commercial failures. For economic and cultural reasons, British cinema has found it hard to articulate visions of the future that work on the leading emergent trends in the present (although there is a more successful audio-visual science fiction tradition on British television). This means that for British audiences, science fiction cinema is overwhelmingly provided by Hollywood. It should be clear from chapter one that any discussion of British film culture which does not include Hollywood as a component of that culture - both in terms of its appeal to audiences and its influence on specific British films - is an incomplete one.<sup>11</sup> It is important to include Hollywood's symbolic goods in this study and not simply because they are demonstrably popular in Britain. Hollywood provides images and stories of

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<sup>10</sup> K. Marx, Marx's Grundrisse (ed) D. McLellan, Paladin, St. Albans, 1973, p.77

<sup>11</sup> See A. Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema" in Screen vol.30. no.4, Autumn 1989. Higson argues that on one definition, focusing on the point of consumption, British film culture is anything which British audiences watch, pp.45- 46. The problem with this view, as John Hill has noted, is that it undermines any arguments for protecting British film production. See J. Hill, "The Issue of National Cinema and British Film Production" in New Questions of British Cinema (ed) D. Petrie, BFI, London, 1992. This issue will be developed further in chapter six.

capitalist modernity as it is developing in its most advanced sectors, but which are also increasingly being synchronised with British political, social, economic and cultural life. Duncan Webster notes the attempt in the 1980s to construct:

“an imaginary America within the entrepreneurial culture that Thatcherism sought to produce from a top hat of tax cuts, privatisation, and an onslaught on the Welfare State, which came with an appeal to Britain’s past (‘Victorian values’) but was more obviously influenced by a wistful gaze at America.”<sup>12</sup>

It has been said of Reaganism that it could not decide whether it is a politics of the id or a politics of the superego. A similar tension structures Thatcherism, caught as it is between the polarities of desire and law, consumerism and moral traditionalism, the market and law and order; combining the two contradictory dynamics of authoritarianism on the one hand with an instinctive feel for tapping into and shaping in conservative directions, popular desires. This contradictory project is succinctly summed up in Stuart Hall’s phrase, “authoritarian populism”. It should be clear that these couplets are closely related to the dynamics between tradition (with its stress on established social relations and expectations) and modernity (with its stress on dissolving the solidity of tradition into air). In many ways it makes more sense to discuss Hollywood cinema in relation to Thatcherism than British cinema, since the latter’s version of the law is too provincial to catch the global state/market dynamics at work, while its commitment to desire is generally less than the full throttle consumerism unleashed in the post-1979 era.

A number of writers have traced how from the 1960s onwards, there is an increasing space within Hollywood for images of modernity that are ambivalent and anxious.<sup>13</sup> Yet there has been little discussion of how the images of modernity which these Hollywood films offer connect with the British context of reception. In fact, on a whole range of questions, from law and order, the family, gender roles, new technology, corporate

<sup>12</sup> D. Webster, Looka Yonder, The Imaginary America Of Populist Culture Comedia/Routledge. London, 1988, p.1

<sup>13</sup> J. Cawelti, “Chinatown and Generic Transformations in recent American Films” in Film Theory and Criticism (eds) G. Mast and M. Cohen, OUP, Oxford, 1985. Also, D. Kellner and M. Ryan, Camera Politica Indiana University Press, 1988.

capitalism, worker-boss relations, (all recurrent themes in the contemporary science fiction genre) political journalists and academics are tracing what used to be called the 'Americanisation' of society. While such influences are generally perceived with anxiety, the film (and television) *culture* which America exports, is more likely to be received seriously by the British intelligentsia than perhaps was once the case. As we shall see, this indicates shifts and bifurcations in the cultural capital of the middle class. It also indicates an increasing recognition that American culture has something to say about how we live and how we might want to live and not want to live, in Britain. Today, we find journalistic commentary making connections between American film (or television) culture and British culture/society, almost routinely. For example one writer noted recently of The X Files:

"It's the tone of the nineties organisation. You realise you've been hearing it in lifts everywhere these past five years. Justified paranoia. Warranted suspicion. Departments evaluating each other. Colleagues according each other full formal protocol titles before terminating each other's contracts." <sup>14</sup>

The three films that I want to focus on are Aliens (J. Cameron, 1986,US), RoboCop ( P. Verhoeven,1987,US), and Total Recall (P.Verhoeven, 1990, US). It is worth recalling the argument in the previous chapter concerning the role of outsiders in appropriating and magnifying the dominant host culture. Paul Verhoeven left Holland as a kind of cultural exile, his heterosexual, sub-Fassbinder narratives of bikers and sex had not endeared him to that country's cultural elites. However, unlike earlier settlers in the United States, Verhoeven's truly baroque renderings of American culture, embroidered not the optimistic myths, but peered into the dark underside of American capitalism. Aliens was of course the sequel to Ridley Scott's, Alien. Together with his 1982 film, Bladerunner, Scott, a British emigre, constructed a paradigmatic science fiction image of America's corporate future. Cameron's sequel to Alien, while being a distinctly more American film in its narrative drive and appropriation of elements of the Vietnam war genre, elaborates on the imagery, analysis and ideology of the first film in a mid-1980s context. If it is true that historically, class has found, according to Lester Friedman, "little resonance in the cultural consciousness of the

<sup>14</sup> V. Rule, The Guardian 2 11.1.96. p.12-13.

United States”<sup>15</sup>, recent European arrivals in Hollywood, such as Scott and Verhoeven, have perhaps found greater receptivity to such delineations of power as the American economy has stalled after the long post-war boom.

This chapter is concerned with the British context of reception for these films and so I map out the broad parameters of social change that may influence readings in particular directions. My interest is, in Janet Staiger's words, to relate “texts to historically contextualised readers.”<sup>16</sup>

In providing a context for these films, I am also identifying some of the issues and trends around capital, gender and geo-cultural dynamics which will be developed in subsequent chapters. In what follows I am going to treat the 1980s and 1990s as a single historical continuum. There are to be sure interesting differences in how these decades were perceived, especially by the New Right and the liberal intelligentsia. Essentially the combative and euphoric confidence of the New Right's programme in the 1980s becomes much more fragile and self questioning in the 1990s as ‘downsizing’, casualisation and the cultural implications of the neo-liberalist agenda, sweeps through the middle class (as the quote on The X-Files makes clear). Thus anxieties and critiques of the New Right agenda also become much more strongly stated in the 1990s. But in the popular cultural texts that I am discussing, the sense of profound transformations in social relations is *already* coupled, before the 1980s has finished, with massive anxieties as to the nature and scope of those transformations. Thus I treat the two decades as a single historical context in which the films I discuss are first screened in cinemas and then watched (with the possibility of multiple viewings) subsequently on television (terrestrial and satellite) and video.

### **The Rise of The New Right**

The economic recession of the late 1920s and 1930s contributed to the first shifts away from free trade policies and a ‘nightwatchman’ state in both America (initially more significantly in Roosevelt's administration) and Britain (which after the Second World War embraced a larger public sector and more state intervention than America). In Britain it was only after

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<sup>15</sup> L. Friedman, (ed) British Cinema And Thatcherism UCL Press, London, 1993, pp.7-8.

<sup>16</sup> J. Staiger, Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1992, p. xi.



Fordism was articulated with Keynesian demand management that “the mass purchasing power to sustain mass production was assured”<sup>17</sup> The welfare state promised universal provision for social security, medical services, housing and education, all underpinned by a commitment to full employment.<sup>18</sup> This, combined with a limited programme of nationalisation installed a network of social rather than commodity relations in various junctures of a capitalist society. Between 1945 and the late 1960s, there was a political consensus as to the desirability of these aims in achieving economic and social stability and the role of the state in promoting them.

This consensus was underpinned by an unprecedented “long boom” in world capitalism in the post-war period.<sup>19</sup> However, the gathering international economic slump culminated in the world oil price crisis of 1973, which helped shatter the economic underpinnings of a social democratic politics. As Andrew Gamble noted,

“Since growth in the world economy can no longer be assumed...increasing public provision and a measure of redistribution financed out of steadily expanding output - has been undermined.”<sup>20</sup>

If the expansion in world trade during the 1950s and 1960s had disguised the “chronic weaknesses in the British economy”,<sup>21</sup> then the end of the long boom exposed the structural problems of British capitalism with particular force.

Ironically, given the dominant culture’s predisposition towards the past, these problems can all be linked to the Imperial history of British capitalism. While the Empire made Britain a dominant economic power in the 18th and 19th century, such Imperial attachments induced a reliance on the markets and raw materials which they provided, a dependence which made British capital and the state sluggish in coordinating investment in

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<sup>17</sup> P. Hirst, “After Henry” in New Times: The Changing Face of Politics (eds) S. Hall and M. Jacques, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1989, p.321.

<sup>18</sup> A. Marwick, British Society since 1945 Penguin Books, London, 1990, p.45.

<sup>19</sup> D. Currie, “World Capitalism in Recession” in The Politics of Thatcherism (eds) S. Hall and M. Jacques, Lawrence and Wishart/Marxism Today, London, 1983, p.79.

<sup>20</sup> A. Gamble, “Thatcherism and Conservative Politics” in The Politics of Thatcherism op.cit., p.117.

<sup>21</sup> A. Marwick, British Society Since 1945 op.cit., p.278.

new machinery, technologies and production methods.<sup>22</sup> As the remnants of the Empire fell apart in the post-war period, British firms experienced competition from rival foreign companies in formerly captive markets.<sup>23</sup> Between 1950 and 1973, the UK's share of manufactured exports fell from 25.4% to 9.1%.<sup>24</sup> After 1945, while the German and Japanese states were spending time and money coordinating and investing in manufacturing industries, the British state sought to retain its role as a world power by allying itself closely to American foreign policy. This in turn brought Britain within the political, economic and cultural hegemony of America in a way that contrasts markedly with France for example. The immediate economic impact of aligning with American foreign policy however required a rearmament programme "which diverted into military expenditure a proportion of national income second only to that of the US".<sup>25</sup> Finally, the Imperial legacy also contributed to British capitalism's international orientation by which it partially disarticulates itself from the national economy, thus leaving its domestic critical mass further weakened. Where as Japanese capital retains 97% of manufacturing in Japan, only 39% of British capital's manufacturing assets are located in the UK.<sup>26</sup> These are the economic conditions which were to provide the basis for a restructuring of the political, economic and cultural settlement which had constituted the post war social order.

During the 1970s, Conservative and then Labour Governments laid the seeds for the rise of the New Right through their attempts to attack organised labour and reduce public borrowing and spending. If the first half of the 1970s saw successful resistance to these initiatives, the wage restrictions of the late 1970s saw the labour movement become increasingly demoralised without ever quite being broken. The strikes of winter 1979 were clearly defensive, surrounded, as David Widgery noted at the time, by "a bourgeois version of the May Events, an enthusiastic pageant of Reaction" indicating that this was indeed "a period of pronounced rightwing swing."<sup>27</sup> The impasse between the needs of capital on the one hand, the interests of

<sup>22</sup> B. Rowthorn, 'The Past Strikes Back' in the Politics of Thatcherism op.cit., p.63.

<sup>23</sup> B. Rowthorn, *ibid*, p.67.

<sup>24</sup> L. Elliott, The Guardian April 14th 1997, p.23.

<sup>25</sup> A. Callinicos, "Exception or Symptom? the British Crisis and the World System" in New Left Review no. 169, May/June 1988, p.103.

<sup>26</sup> C. Harman, Socialist Review May 1996, p.20.

<sup>27</sup> D. Widgery, Preserving Disorder Pluto Press, London, 1989, pp.166-167.

labour on the other, with the contradictory position of the Heath, Wilson and Callaghan governments in between, (residually committed to the political goals of the consensus period, but responding to the new circumstances of recession and capital's emerging agenda), was broken by the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979.<sup>28</sup>

In America, Ronald Reagan came to power a year later and the New Right there targeted the 'Great Society' welfare programmes of the Kennedy and Johnson era. Reagan's subsequent re-election in the mid-1980s, like Margaret Thatcher's, ensured the consolidation of the New Right's 'New Deal' for capital.<sup>29</sup> The new agenda for business was remarkably similar in both countries. There was a drive for more favourable business taxation, less state regulation, reducing the power of organised labour, rolling back the welfare state, controlling public spending and therefore inflation and, especially in the UK, a rolling programme of privatisation and the creation of markets for private capital in such 'products' as health and insurance as public provision declines in quantity and quality.<sup>30</sup>

### **Components of the New Right**

John Clarke has identified three components or strands which constitute the New Right in America which are also pertinent to the New Right in Britain. These strands are neo-liberalism (the New Right's economic agenda), neo-Conservatism (its political agenda) and its neo-traditionalism (the New Right's moral and cultural agenda).<sup>31</sup> I want to outline each of these components in turn, suggesting how to some extent they reinforce each other. Crucially however, it has become increasingly evident in various political discourses, that there are major tensions and contradictions between these components, contradictions which relate to the law/desire polarity already discussed. The shifts which these strands of the New Right initiate and respond to and the fissures between these agendas are integral to the examples of film culture that I will be referring to. In particular I will be focusing on one area in each of these strands: in terms of neo-liberalism

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<sup>28</sup> M. Jacques, 'Thatcherism: Breaking Out of The Impasse' in *The Politics of Thatcherism* op.cit., pp.40-62.

<sup>29</sup> M. O'Higgins, in *New Society* 15th Nov, 1984, vol. 70, no.1143, pp.240-242.

<sup>30</sup> J. Clarke, *New Times and Old Enemies: Essays On Cultural Studies and America* Harper Collins/Academic, London, 1991, p.116.

<sup>31</sup> J. Clarke, *ibid*, p.123.

I am particularly interested in how changes in production and consumption have impacted on class and gendered identities; with regard to neo-Conservatism I want to discuss how political shifts have turned on the question of law and order; on the moral/cultural axis, I want to focus on what is happening to the institution of the family.

### **Neo-Liberalism.**

For Fredrich Von Hayek, a key guru for the revived belief in *laissez faire* capitalism, the decline in the fortunes of capital could be traced to the over regulation of the market by the state and state sanctioned blockages to market laws such as organised labour. Hayek sought a generalisation of market laws whose conditions were to be guaranteed but not interfered with, by the state. Thus the claims of the community over the individual which had underpinned the social democratic consensus and its beliefs in the desirability of intervening in market outcomes, had to be discredited.<sup>32</sup> The 1980s saw the steady withdrawal of the state as a provider of universal social provision and the abandonment of full employment as a desirable goal. The deregulation of financial services triggered the consumer boom of the mid-1980s which functioned to underpin the acquisitive individualism celebrated by Thatcherism and encouraged further opting out of collective provision.<sup>33</sup> If in the 1970s citizenship had become closely linked to political activism, in the 1980s, it was the active consumer, frequently termed the narcissistic self, which was fostered.<sup>34</sup> This development merely exacerbates the historically deep seated tensions between public and private life in 20th century capitalism.<sup>35</sup> This tension, as we shall see, has important gender implications.

While consumption was fostered by state policies, the New Right were ideologically indisposed to intervene into market outcomes in the sphere of production. This accelerated industrial decline in such areas as engineering, coal, motor cars, shipbuilding, as well as those oldest of industries associated with English heritage: brewing and wool.<sup>36</sup> There was also a

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<sup>32</sup> A. Gamble, "Thatcherism and Conservative Politics" op. cit., p.114.

<sup>33</sup> C. Leadbeater, "Power To the Person" in New Times op.cit., p.141.

<sup>34</sup> B. Campbell, Goliath Methuen, London, 1993, p.95.

<sup>35</sup> A. Callinicos, Against Postmodernism : A Marxist Critique Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp.144-153.

<sup>36</sup> A. Marwick, British Society since 1945 op. cit., pp. 308-310.

concomitant shift toward the service sector economy and an accompanying growth in de-skilled, non unionised, low waged, part-time and short-term contracted labour, which is increasingly female.<sup>37</sup> Capital also redirects itself into new technologies and the media. Thatcherism sought to further open the economy up to global capitalism, privileging the role of the City and such industries as tourism (particularly the heritage industry)<sup>38</sup> as well as encouraging foreign manufacturing investment by driving down wages and ensuring a compliant workforce. These changes in production and consumption have had an important impact on class and gendered identities, as we shall see.

### **Neo-Conservatism.**

Where as previous postwar Conservative governments had accepted the legitimacy of consensus politics, the New Right, in accord with the logic of the free market, accepts that there must be 'losers' if there are to be winners. The period is witness to more than cultural returns to the past, with the state itself returning to its mid-nineteenth century role as "the unabashed protector of economic privilege, much as it was when Marx composed the *Communist Manifesto*." <sup>39</sup> Organised labour was declared to be the 'enemy within', one of a long line of internal 'others' whose presence threatened the market utopia the Conservatives believed themselves to be constructing. Along with 'benefit scroungers' and travellers, the Conservatives were clearly at best lukewarm on the value of a multi cultural society. While the Conservative Election Manifesto in 1987 made more positive overtures towards immigrant communities,<sup>40</sup> by the mid-1990s, the political discourse of the Government had imploded into a Little Englandism in response to the European Union's plans for political and economic integration.<sup>41</sup> Here we have a major contradiction between the neo-liberalist components of the New Right which are transnational in their orientation towards global capitalism and global mass culture and the neo-Conservatism, which draws on and resuscitates a virulent nationalism

<sup>37</sup> J. Clarke, *New Times and Old Enemies* op.cit., p. 105.

<sup>38</sup> J. Corner and S. Harvey, "Mediating tradition and modernity: the heritage/enterprise couplet" in *Enterprise and Heritage* (ed) J. Corner and S. Harvey, Routledge, London, 1991, p.48.

<sup>39</sup> A. Rankin, "Christopher Lasch and the Moral Agony of the Left." in *New Left Review* no.215, January/February, 1996, p.151.

<sup>40</sup> J. Corner and S. Harvey, "Introduction", op.cit., p.11.

<sup>41</sup> H. Young, *The Guardian*, October 10th, 1996, p.17.

buttressed by an exclusive and intolerant conception of national identity.

This shrunken and exclusive conception of national identity is intimately linked with political authoritarianism. On the question of law and order, one of the key themes of authoritarian populism, there is a complex dynamic of reinforcement and disavowal between neo-liberalism and neo-Conservatism. As the social fall out of free market policies is counted in rising crime and sporadic riots, so the coercive apparatus of the state has to be expanded. Thus the withdrawal from a commitment to social provision does not indicate a withering of the state, but rather, as Gamble notes, a "redirection of state energies."<sup>42</sup> Here again there is a peculiarly strong synchronisation with the American experience. After 75 years of relative stability in the proportion of the population in U.S. prisons, the 1980s saw a shift towards a policy of mass incarceration ( Escape From New York (John Carpenter, 1981, US) set in 1997, where Manhattan has been transformed into a maximum security prison, was remarkably prescient here). The combined local, state and federal prison population grew from 493,000 in 1980 to 1, 179, 000 by the end of the decade.<sup>43</sup> In Britain too, the economic crisis of the 1970s brought with it a mushrooming of concern about law and order in both popular and academic discourses.<sup>44</sup> By the mid-1980s, at the height of the Miners Strike, debates as to whether Britain was sliding towards a police state, were widespread.<sup>45</sup> By the early 1990s Britain had a higher proportion of its citizens in prisons than any other country in Western Europe.<sup>46</sup> Nor have anxieties concerning the erosion of civil liberties eased in the mid-1990s as law and order legislation becomes increasingly authoritarian and unaccountable.<sup>47</sup> The structural link however between the increase in a panoply of social controls and the deregulation of the economy must however be disavowed by the New Right. Organised and 'disorganised' resistance to the regime, from strikes to crime, from environmental campaigns to riots, must instead be blamed on a cultural and moral degeneration.

<sup>42</sup> A. Gamble, "Thatcherism and Conservative Politics" op.cit., p.116.

<sup>43</sup> A. Rutherford, in The Guardian 13. 3. 96, p.15.

<sup>44</sup> See S. Hall, C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke and B. Roberts, Policing The Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order. Macmillan, London, 1978.

<sup>45</sup> R. Reiner, in New Society 2nd August, 1984, vol.69, no.1128, pp. 51-56.

<sup>46</sup> N. Abercrombie, A. Warde, K. Soothill, J. Urry, S. Walby, Contemporary British Society Polity Press, 1995, Cambridge, p.509.

<sup>47</sup> See for example, C. Berens and S. Hough, in The Big Issue No. 217, January 27-February 2, 1997, pp.10-11.

## Neo-Traditionalism.

If the relations between neo-liberalism and neo-Conservatism is one of reinforcement and disavowal, the relations between neo-liberalism and neo-traditionalism is one of negation and compensation. The expansion of the rule of capital into every sphere of political policy and economic life relativises the transcendental or metaphysical values which 'tradition' tends to mobilise. As Terry Eagleton remarks, "base and superstructure, commodity production and spiritual legitimation, are embarrassingly at odds." <sup>48</sup> It is the institution of the family that comes to play the key role of compensating in the moral and cultural sphere the exultation of an amoral market logic. Apart from the nation, the family is the only other collectivity which the New Right can tolerate. Society is seen as no more than the sum of its family parts (Thatcher once famously said that there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families) and it is through its image of those (family) parts that the New Right's moral leadership for an atomised people is articulated. Private, monogamous, heterosexual, hierarchical, patriarchal, aspirational and common-sensical: the family as imagined by the New Right provides those transcendental values by which order and authority can be preserved and right and wrong clearly demarcated.

Yet this compensatory role, necessary for the ideological work of legitimation, is steadily undermined by the very forces which neo-liberalism unleashes. In part this is because there is a *cultural* conflict between the imperatives of consumption and choice on the one hand and the prescriptive championing of the old model family. However I want here to focus on the conflict between base and superstructure: that is how the *material* underpinnings of the traditional family have been steadily eroded.

In the era of capitalism's long boom for example, annual growth rates of household incomes in America grew between 2.4 and 3 % across the social spectrum. But between 1973 and 1993, the 40% poorest households have seen their income fall, a middle 20% has stagnated while only the top 40% have enjoyed income growth. <sup>49</sup> Britain has seen similar class polarisation characterised by Therbon, for example, as the "two-thirds, one-third society"

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<sup>48</sup> T. Eagleton, "The Crisis of Contemporary Culture" in *New Left Review* 196, Nov/Dec 1992, p. 33.

<sup>49</sup> J. Cassidy, "Death of the Middle Class" in *New Internationalist*, no.281/ July 1996, p.12.

(with the latter third splitting off into a permanent underclass).<sup>50</sup> In a memorable phase, Therbon described the class polarisation in America and Britain as the “Brazilianisation of advanced capitalism.”<sup>51</sup> Will Hutton has characterised the polarisation as the thirty, thirty, forty society. In Hutton’s formulation the first thirty is constituted by the economically inactive. The second thirty is composed of two groups. Firstly, part-time and casual workers, 80% of whom are women; secondly those in full time but insecure jobs (including the short term contracts restructuring middle class employment). As in the US, the final forty are the only group whose market power has increased during the 1980s.<sup>52</sup>

The influx of women, including a high profile minority into managerial and senior business jobs<sup>53</sup> as well as a huge influx into the bottom end of the service and retail sector, has had major effects on the traditional shape of the family, especially when combined with rising male unemployment.<sup>54</sup> The pressures on the family unleashed by the New Right have been colossal. The percentage of households without work has risen from 8% to 19% between 1979 and 1995.<sup>55</sup> Live births outside the sacred institution of marriage rocketed after the rise of the New Right. In 1979 the figure stood at 9% of live births, only a few percentage points higher than the decade much demonised by the New Right, the 1960s. But by 1994, despite this apparently being the era of “family values”, the figure stands at 33% of all births.<sup>56</sup> Clearly then unemployment, de-industrialisation, the uneven geographical distribution of work, changing relations of the gender-class nexus, have taken their toll on the traditional family. Larry Elliot has situated these changes in a wider context:

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<sup>50</sup> G. Therbon, “The Two-Thirds, One-Third Society” in New Times The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s (eds) S. Hall and M. Jacques, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1989, pp111-112.

<sup>51</sup> Therbon, *ibid*, p.111

<sup>52</sup> W. Hutton, The State We’re In Johnathan Cape, London, 1995, pp.105-108.

<sup>53</sup> J. Clarke, New Times Old Enemies *op. cit.*, p.108

<sup>54</sup> W. Hutton, The State We’re In *op.cit.*, p.185.

<sup>55</sup> The Guardian, 6.1.97, p.16.

<sup>56</sup> L. Elliott, The Guardian 2.12.96, p.18.



“...the decline of the family is the domestic manifestation of globalisation. Just as family firms have no place in a world of transnational corporations, family ties are an encumbrance to modern capitalism. Paternity leave? Too costly. Curbs on the length of the working week? Inefficient.”<sup>57</sup>

## **Globalisation and Dystopia**

The emergence of the concept of globalisation shares similar historical circumstances to the rise of postmodernism: both are indicative of the generalised pervasion of market logic through out social life. While both globalisation and postmodernism have been combined in historical- cultural analysis,<sup>58</sup> globalisation seems to me more generally compatible with a materialist analysis. While postmodernism is characterised by philosophical positions antithetical to historical materialism (its rejection of realist epistemology, its extreme relativism and textualisation of the real)<sup>59</sup> globalisation has its roots in world-system theories,<sup>60</sup> the International Relations branch of political sciences, and sociology which became increasingly aware of the need to transcend the nation-state as a unit of analysis. Furthermore, as a concept, globalisation encourages comparative analysis of similar/different configurations of modernity.

This is not to suggest that the term globalisation has been uncontentious. In some discourses it has been used ideologically, as a “justificatory myth”<sup>61</sup> to persuade workers to accept casualisation, low pay, corporate blackmail and welfare cuts as inevitable, while the actual evidence of globalisation is also uneven.<sup>62</sup> Liberals like Will Hutton are extremely anxious that globalisation “denudes liberal democracy of meaning” as real policy decisions concerning budgets, inflation, labour relations and welfare systems are determined by deregulated global financial markets.<sup>63</sup> At the same time Hutton and others have argued that globalisation is a better

<sup>57</sup> L. Elliot, The Guardian 2.12.96 ,p.18.

<sup>58</sup> D. Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity, Blackwell, Oxford,1989.

<sup>59</sup> C. Norris, Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism. Intellectuals and the Gulf War Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1992.

<sup>60</sup> I. Wallerstein, The Modern World-System Academic, New York, 1974.

<sup>61</sup> P. Bourdieu, Acts of Resistance, Against the New Myths of Our Time Polity, Cambridge, 1998, p.38

<sup>62</sup> P. Hirst and G. Thompson, Globalization in Question Polity Press, Cambridge, 1996.

<sup>63</sup> W. Hutton, “Gambling With The World’s Welfare” The Guardian 15.6. 95, p.17.

description of financial markets than actual production.<sup>64</sup> As Hutton argues:

“Ford may produce a global car, but 80% of its fixed assets are in the U.S.; even the “global” Pepsi Cola and MacDonald’s have more than half their fixed assets in the U.S.....There are companies operating in many countries, but none has slipped the national leash to become a stateless body operating in a borderless world.” <sup>65</sup>

The empirical facts of production at least do seem to suggest that globalisation has been overgeneralised or the arguments that it is a qualitatively new phenomenon, exaggerated. For Robertson, globalisation is a centuries long process and in the contemporary period, the networks of transnational interdependence continue to be woven. However, what is new for Robertson, is the growing *self-consciousness* of these material processes, the “intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” <sup>66</sup> At the level of culture and consciousness then, the term does capture deeper shifts and transformations in perceptions. The idea of capitalism as a “stateless body operating in a borderless world” as Hutton puts it for example, is in fact very strong in both Aliens and Total Recall irrespective of its empirical accuracy.

Giddens’ discussion of the dynamics of modernity and the extension of those dynamics on a global scale, may suggest why globalisation strikes such a chord in the phenomenological tissue of everyday living. Giddens points out that under modernity time and space are separated from the locality of place (so important for the organic community) and recombined across vast distances and temporal rhythms. What we ‘do’ in our own place is coordinated and interdependent with organisations, processes and people who we will never know and never meet. Thus production and consumption is, in Giddens’ phrase, *disembedded* from local contexts. <sup>67</sup> He cites two disembedding mechanisms in particular. These are ‘symbolic’ tokens and ‘expert’ systems. The latter is a disembedding mechanism because it is the deployment of knowledge systems which have “validity independent of the

<sup>64</sup> W. Hutton, “Markets Threaten Life and Soul of the Party” The Guardian 4.1.94, p.13.

<sup>65</sup> W. Hutton, “Myth that sets the world to right” The Guardian 12.6.95, p.17.

<sup>66</sup> R. Robertson, Globalization Sage, London, 1992, p.8.

<sup>67</sup> A. Giddens, Modernity and Self Identity, Self and Society in the Late Modern Age Polity Press, Cambridge, pp.16 -17.

practitioners and clients who make use of them.”

Symbolic tokens include money which “brackets time” through the use of credit, and space, “since standardised value allows transactions between a multiplicity of individuals who never physically meet one another.” <sup>68</sup>

Symbolic tokens would also include culture and indeed Waters argues that it is precisely the ‘culturalisation’ of the economy, the extent to which exchange is accomplished symbolically, which leads to globalisation. <sup>69</sup> This would account for the fact that financial capital is most evidently global while fixed capital and the realisation of surplus value through production remains stubbornly local. As Waters argues, “[m]aterial exchanges are therefore rooted in localised markets, factories, offices and shops.” <sup>70</sup>

Thus it could be argued that the tensions, relations and contradictions between the local and the global which globalisation brings, points to a renewed *figurability* of class relations. This is the term which Fredric Jameson deploys in his suggestive analysis of Dog Day Afternoon (Sydney Lumet, 1975, US). <sup>71</sup> It refers to a maturation of class relations where they become representable in a tangible form. An older, more integrated social order (such as the organic community) helped to conceal class relations as the local was fused with the national. Globalisation penetrates and restructures this social order according to a wider space-time continuum, thus providing that “visceral and existential mode of experience” which makes something as abstract and extensive as late capitalism’s class relations, representable. <sup>72</sup>

It is in this sense that Jameson discusses the film as a political allegory, whereby the “ur-narrative or master fantasy about the interaction of collective subjects” <sup>73</sup> is given concrete embodiment in character and place. Specifically, the marginality of the bank robbers, the bank employees and the local police is pointed up by the arrival of the FBI officials who, with

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<sup>68</sup> A. Giddens, *ibid*, p.18.

<sup>69</sup> M. Waters, Globalization Routledge, London, 1995, pp.9-10.

<sup>70</sup> M. Waters, *op.cit.*, p.9.

<sup>71</sup> F. Jameson, “Class and allegory in contemporary mass culture: Dog Day Afternoon as a political film” in Movies and Methods vol.II (ed) B. Nichols, University of California Press, London, 1985, pp.715-733.

<sup>72</sup> F. Jameson, *ibid*, p.719.

<sup>73</sup> F. Jameson, The Political Unconscious Routledge, London, 1989, p.80.

their “technocratic expertise” (one of Giddens’ disembedding mechanisms) represent the “essential impersonality and post-individualistic structure” of late capitalism.<sup>74</sup> Jameson suggests that this is underlined by the juxtaposition of Pacino’s highly individualistic (and emotional) method style acting, backed up with all the accumulated baggage of his star image, which is nevertheless powerless against the relatively anonymous and resolutely unhistrionic performance by the television contract player (James Broderick) who plays the FBI officer.<sup>75</sup> Thus the film makes self-reflexive use of the ‘grammar’ of acting as it has been institutionally produced by the film and television industries, to underline the struggle between the old, autonomous, humanist monad and the new subject who is a component of a network, a system. This tension between different conceptions of identity is something I will want to return to below.

The geographical cleavages are pointed up by the juxtaposition between the branch bank and the metonymically linked “Mom and Pop store” (Waters’ sites of material exchange) which the local police set up operations in, and, in a different spatial/temporal chronotope, the “eerie and impersonal science fiction landscape of the airport finale.”<sup>76</sup> Here we have that contrast between material exchanges rooted in the declining inner city urban locality on the one hand and the controlled transnational space of the airport, “utterly technologised and functional, a place beyond city and country alike,”<sup>77</sup>

The generic connotations evident at the conclusion of Dog Day Afternoon anticipates the fertility of the science fiction genre in the 1980s. In films such as Total Recall, Aliens and Robo Cop, it is as if the economic base has extended upwards into the superstructure, dismembering, absorbing or partially incorporating various aspects of civil society and the state. There is something of Darko Suvin’s notion of *cognitive estrangement* at work in the hypothesis which these films work from. For Suvin, science fiction at its best, involves making the familiar strange for the purposes of critical re-evaluation. What makes such a defamiliarisation generically specific to science fiction (rather than for example, fantasy) is that the agency of

<sup>74</sup> F. Jameson, “Class and allegory in contemporary mass culture” op.cit., p.728.

<sup>75</sup> This links in with Jameson’s notion of the waning of affect. See “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” in Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism Verso, London, 1991, p.10.

<sup>76</sup> F. Jameson, op.cit., p.730.

<sup>77</sup> F. Jameson, ibid.

transformation is rooted in the “body of cognitions” in social circulation.<sup>78</sup> Literary and cinematic examples of the genre have historically drawn on a range of cognitions, from Darwinism, Malthusian principles, the physical sciences, technological change and cognitions drawn from political sciences (from fears of the state to imperial tales of territorial expansion). In the 1980s, science fiction cinema becomes rooted in deploying a *cognition of economics*.

In projecting the dominant economic logic of the contemporary period into a dystopian future, the trio of films under discussion, would appear to articulate some dissenting criticisms on this economic logic. The situation though is complicated once we ask what has happened to the utopian desires which popular culture usually locates at the centre of its dynamic. In his concern to explore utopianism in quotidian and cultural expression, Ernst Bloch, while generally critical of Freudian psychoanalysis, did note approvingly that Freud established a correlation between anxiety and wish fulfilment, prohibition and desire.<sup>79</sup>

If the films in question are profoundly anxious about some aspects of contemporary capitalism, they also tap into the utopian possibilities of a new conception of the subject and new identities which capitalism also appears to be developing. We will return to this in more detail below. For the moment it is enough to note that dystopian anxiety is combined with a desire for a ‘post-bourgeois’ (although not necessarily post-capitalist) structure of feeling, that is one which breaks with the conception of the subject and the psychical and social responsibilities of the subject (the Protestant ethic of deferred gratification for example) which have characterised bourgeois society for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the dialectical interplay between wish fulfilment and anxiety, the flipside of the celebration of a post-bourgeois identity is the fear (in Total Recall and RoboCop) that this identity is being integrated into the unrelenting needs of a new mode of capital accumulation (Jameson’s postmodernist network). Conversely, as we shall see, in Aliens the post-bourgeois identities on offer (particularly around gendered identities), provoke patriarchal anxieties which are deflected into a conflict with the

<sup>78</sup> P. Parinder, Science Fiction, Its Criticism and Teaching Methuen, London, 1980, p.22.

<sup>79</sup> E. Bloch, The Principle of Hope Vol. 1, (eds) N. Plaice, S. Plaice and P. Knight, MIT press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995, pp.82-85.

monster. In all cases, the films are also working with a second converse utopian desire, to return to the very institutions and social responsibilities which have characterised bourgeois society; and this as a bulwark against the rapacious extension of commodity relations through out society. Simultaneously, the implicit anxiety underlining this regressive utopianism is that it imprisons the subject in a narrow class and/or gender identity.

Yet for Jameson, this contradictory dynamic, preserved in his 1970s analysis of the antagonism between the autonomy of the monad (Sonny) and the FBI agent who is merely a relay in an integrated system, is flattened out in his more general arguments in the 1980s. Here, the rather more linear, undialectical propositions of post-modernism come to the fore. In a Marxism Today interview with Stuart Hall, Jameson argued that:

“modernism was a response to modernisation in the West from, say, the mid-to-late-19th century until the second world war. It was a response to a modernisation which was incomplete, and in which the modernised enclaves and forces themselves were still working against a background of older class situations, older forms of agriculture and, in some parts of Europe, even older aristocratic strata, which the second world war finally disposed of.”<sup>80</sup>

What is at stake here for Jameson is that Modernism produced “oppositional or critical cultural forms” and that these can emerge only when “the economy is not yet too standardised and there’s still room for both individual entrepreneurs and the same kinds of agents on the level of culture.”<sup>81</sup> What Jameson seems to be constructing here is a constellation between older pre-capitalist class formations and the class formations of the petty bourgeoisie. We saw in the last chapter that Adorno had argued that in Europe, the “remnants of the old were,...ferments of the new”, a constellation which sustained the “doubt” whether “man was made merely to exchange.”<sup>82</sup> I used this insight to analyse the cinematic constellation/reconciliation in The Private Life Of Henry VIII between the old (the aristocracy) and the new (the working class). Jameson however, constructs a constellation between the older pre-capitalist resistance to

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<sup>80</sup> S. Hall and F. Jameson, “Clinging To The Wreckage” in Marxism Today September 1990, p.28.

<sup>81</sup> S.Hall, and F. Jameson, *ibid*, p.29.

<sup>82</sup> T.W. Adorno, Minima Moralia New Left Books, London, 1974, p.196.

capitalism with a rather different new force within capitalism: the petty bourgeoisie. This leaves the working class strikingly out of the equation, which, for a Marxist, is surprising to say the least.

Now, what I mean by the working class is quite specific to the Marxist tradition: the working class is that class which sells its labour power for a wage and produces surplus value which *others* then wield as power. This does not rule out that people may have other class identities as well, and indeed, one of the key themes of this chapter will be the contradictory position of the middle classes who both sell their labour power but also have privileged access to cultural capital.<sup>83</sup> It is nevertheless important to insist that the commodification of labour power is today the globally dominant form of production where as in the era of Marx and Engels, the working class was minuscule in relation to the dominance of agricultural/peasant/artisanal based labour. The commodification of labour power by capital is *the* basis of the central, structural contradiction, antagonism and therefore opposition in capitalist society, *not* the autonomy of small, entrepreneurial capitalism vs monopoly capitalism.<sup>84</sup> It is the uncomfortable position *between* the capital-labour conflict which “agents on the level of culture” mediate.

Having disappeared the categories of labour, labour power and surplus value, Jameson is then in a position to account for the transition to postmodernism:

“...the real difference between postmodernism and modernism is that postmodernism is a situation of tendentially complete modernisation in which those older remnants have been removed.”<sup>85</sup>

What cannot be removed however and what remains (unacknowledged by Jameson) is precisely the labour half of the capital-labour dynamic and which would provide a counter, a site of opposition within the

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<sup>83</sup> P. Bourdieu, Distinction, A Social Critique Of The Judgement Of Taste, Routledge, London, 1984.

<sup>84</sup> Jameson puts forward a similar argument concerning the historical conditions of possibility for surrealism, which includes a time when products still showed “traces of an artisanal organization of labour while their distribution is still predominantly assured by a network of small shopkeepers.” See his Marxism and Form, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, p.104.

<sup>85</sup> S.Hall and F. Jameson, op.cit., pp.28-29.

“postmodern”. Jameson however cannot see this and instead, while he recognises some positive aspects of postmodernism, such as the “plebianisation of culture”<sup>86</sup>, his overall concern is that with modernisation more or less complete, everything is integrated into an anonymous system. Culture is “secreted by the economic rather than being produced in opposition to it.”<sup>87</sup> If we introduce labour back into the equation however we introduce a more dialectical materialist account.

Commodification is never a completed process, because locked into the heart of the commodity form is an antagonism - lived out *now* in the conflict between capital and labour - between exchange value and the *memory* and the *potential* of social and human use values which can never be completely erased whatever the domination of exchange value. Memory alerts us to the importance of the past; potentiality alerts us to the importance of the new and the yet to be, but envisaged. Both memory (eg Robo Cop) and potentialities of technology (eg Total Recall) are important aspects of the films under discussion. It is this contradictory dynamic which is erased by the linear, ‘stages’ theory of cultural and historical change Jameson is wedded to and which derives ultimately from the highly compromised theories of Stalinism and before that, the Second International.

### **Between a Rock and a Hard Place: the New Middle Class**

While Marx insisted on the fundamental contradiction between two socioeconomic blocs, capital and labour, sociologists in the twentieth century have pointed to an expanding middle class complicating Marx’s starkly dichotomous nineteenth century view of class relations. One way of thinking through this apparent problem is to reject the conflation of the terms capital and labour, with actual classes. Rather, the terms indicate the objective processes and tensions built into societies where the production of social wealth takes place between those who buy and those who sell labour power, the consequences of which are the extraction of surplus value, realisation of exchange value, accumulation for the sake of accumulation, competition and other socioeconomic features. These structural and inevitable features of the system play across the existence of

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<sup>86</sup> S. Hall and F. Jameson, *ibid*, p.29.

<sup>87</sup> S. Hall and F. Jameson, *ibid*, p.29.



actual classes with all their empirical messiness of internal differentiation within classes and correspondences between one class fraction and a fraction from another class. Thus the middle class, fractions of which enjoy material and cultural privileges not generally enjoyed by the working class, sells its labour power in exchange for a wage, just as the working class must. As we shall see, this economic ambiguity in the position of the middle class has intensified in recent years. We shall also see that there is an important bifurcation within the middle class along cultural lines. I will relate this discussion of class to the characterology (to coin a phrase) evident in the films under discussion. I suggested in the previous chapter that one of the distinguishing features of the Hollywood hero or heroine was their ability to condense different class identities into a single figure. In the more optimistic era of Hollywood, this allowed for visions of upward social mobility. In the context of the 1980s, against the grain of the New Right's propaganda concerning entrepreneurial opportunity and a "peoples capitalism", these films, without exception, are concerned with downward social mobility.

Why though has the middle class expanded this century? Clarke reminds us of Marx's discussion of the "circuits of capital". This involves the processes of production, circulation, exchange and consumption: surplus value cannot be achieved unless this entire circuit is achieved. The problem for capital is that this process, as Clarke points out,

"is not simple and straight forward, but includes gaps, interruptions, blockages, tensions and contradictions, which need to be overcome before the circuit can be completed and the process can begin again."

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The middle class have emerged and expanded in order to address the problem of coordinating all the factors that enable the circuit of capital to be completed. "Co-ordination requires coordinators,"<sup>89</sup> as Clarke puts it. Ideologically, the middle class can be seen as mediators between property owners and the working class; transmitting up to the former the compromises necessary to win the consent of the latter, while transmitting down to latter the agenda of the former and the "normality" of the system.

<sup>88</sup> J. Clarke, *New Times and Old Enemies* op.cit., pp.48-49.

<sup>89</sup> J. Clarke, *ibid*, pp.49-50.

However, in all three films, confronted with various gaps, interruptions and blockages in the circuit of capital, the middle class protagonists find their class function as coordinators/mediators and their class identity challenged.

Leaving aside Jameson's small self employed entrepreneur, the middle class as "labour" can be seen as constituting a three tiered structure. In the lower tier, those routine white collar occupations dominated by women, such as clerical and service sector workers, are increasingly susceptible to the pressures of proletarianisation.<sup>90</sup> This is particularly the case with the spread of new technology which increases routine, managerial control, and bureaucracy while deskilling the worker.<sup>91</sup> At the same time new technology has, as Andre Gorz predicted, intellectualised certain occupations within the skilled working class, requiring for example, "co-operation among teams within which the traditional barriers between workmen, technicians and engineers, fade away."<sup>92</sup> This blurring of class identity or convergence between a lower grade middle class worker and the skilled working class, is quite central to the narrative and imagery of Alien.

Judith Newton has argued that Ripley represents a middle class feminist myth that the presence of women in the workforce can humanise the nature of work in a late capitalist context.<sup>93</sup> Yet Ripley's class identity is more intriguingly unstable than this suggests. In relation to Alien, Kavanagh<sup>94</sup> notes the gestures towards an alliance between Ripley and the black worker, Parker, who works 'below decks' in the bowels of the "atomic powered sweatshop"<sup>95</sup> that is the mining ship, *Nostromo*. More specifically however, the ship is a condensation of *two* modes of production, or better, two distinct historical moments within the shifting mode of production that is capitalism. The 'industrial' imagery (parts of the ship, where Brett dies for example, look like an abandoned factory) and historical associations around mining alludes to the sharp class differences represented by Parker and Brett and the factory-like imagery of their working environment (all

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<sup>90</sup> N. Abercrombie et al, Contemporary British Society op.cit., pp.180-181.

<sup>91</sup> N. Abercrombie et al, *ibid*, p.182.

<sup>92</sup> A. Gorz, Socialism and Revoultion Allen Lane, London, 1975, pp.128-9.

<sup>93</sup> J. Newton, "Feminism and Anxiety" in Alien Zone, Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema Verso, London, 1990, p.83.

<sup>94</sup> J. H. Kavanagh, "Feminism, Humanism and Science" in Alienzone *ibid*, pp.73-81.

<sup>95</sup> J. Hoberman, Village Voice 22.7.86, p.52.

steam, oil and dirt). Parker incidentally is played by Yaphet Kotto, who in the previous year had starred in the classic 'working stiff' film, Blue Collar (Paul Schrader, 1978). Yet *Nostromo* is also the very antithesis of the low skill, labour intensive operation. The ship is run by a highly skilled, skeletal crew supported by 'Mother', the ship's computer. Yet the middle class autonomy and self directed nature of the work which the crew have from the Company turns out to be more apparent than real. Their mission has been determined and controlled by Ash, the Company android, and Mother, whose programming makes the Company rather than the crew, its/'her' first priority. It is this technological domination which forces the convergence between Ripley and Parker. However, as Kavanagh and Newton note, the film finally cannot commit itself to the concrete specificity of a class alliance. Ripley's concern for the cat, functions, for Kavanagh, as a "final sign of recovery for an ideological humanism," <sup>96</sup> (i.e. one divested of class rebellion). Newton however notes the link between this ideological humanism and the "traditionally feminine qualities," <sup>97</sup> which are reattached to Ripley during her search for Jones. Meanwhile 'below decks' Parker and Lambert meet their nemesis. The unstable class identity of Ripley and the way it is complexly articulated through gender is further developed in Aliens.

Within the three tiered structure of the middle class, the middle sector, composed of lower professions, technicians and junior management are also vulnerable to rationalising and deskilling processes. <sup>98</sup> Again this strikes a chord with the narrative and imagery of Robo Cop. Just as Ripley's 'humanity' was affirmed by her realignment with a traditional gender identity, so in this film the lead character's 'humanity', i.e. his middle class identity, is residually affirmed via the memories of family life which Murphy/Robo Cop has of his previous existence. At the same time Robo Cop is the physical embodiment of proletarianisation, no longer even a mere appendage to the machine, now incorporated directly into technological development. As Sheila Johnston noted in her review of the film, RoboCop "is capitalism's model worker...But, like many he aspires to upward mobility, namely human status." <sup>99</sup> Yet for the spectator, something more

<sup>96</sup> J. H. Kavanagh, "Feminism, Humanism and Science" op.cit., p.79.

<sup>97</sup> J. Newton, op.cit., p.86.

<sup>98</sup> N. Abercrombie, Contemporary British Society op.cit., pp.186-188.

<sup>99</sup> S. Johnston, The Independent 4/2/88, p.17.

ambiguous is at play. As Gilbert Adair notes, “[d]ehumanisation, previously understood as an entirely pejorative concept, has been transformed into a positive quality.”<sup>100</sup> For RoboCop is also the site/sight of psychological investment and a spectacle of fantasy empowerment where the villains, both in the boardroom and on the streets, can be dealt with.

At the top end of the middle class are the higher professionals and senior managers integrated into the upper echelons of commercial or state organisations. In The Revolt of The Elites Christopher Lasch argued that globalisation has produced a transnational elite, disengaged from the condition of life which their fellow national inhabitants experience, increasingly operating across national boundaries and having more in common with their counterparts in other countries than the ordinary men and women in their own.<sup>101</sup> Again this strikes a chord with Total Recall. As in Robo Cop the unstable class identity of the hero is figured by splitting him into two. Quaid, a “working stiff”<sup>102</sup> is not as he thought, “a dumb construction worker...but a figure of importance.”<sup>103</sup> As Hauser he is second in command to corporate boss, Cohagen. Lasch attacks the upper middle class for becoming the servant of an “oligarchy”.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, Quaid (like Lasch) will come to denounce the Hausers’ of the world, although in more colourful language, (“the guy’s an asshole” he tells Cohagen). Yet it is his former identity as Hauser which puts him in a position to lead the liberation of Mars from Cohagen’s tyranny.

If, as I am suggesting, these films are embedded in a middle class structure of feeling, it is not one that is restricted to the middle class. The anxieties and desires concerning class relations and mobility are cross class even if here, through narrative focalisation, they are mediated within a middle class matrix. Crucially though, this mediation and the figurability of class relations generally, has not eclipsed Hollywood’s ability to construct films which appeal to an audience outside the middle class. The mise-en-scene in which the characters are embedded (urban conflict, poverty, warfare of one sort or another, collectivism versus individualism etc), speaks much more to

<sup>100</sup> G. Adair, Sunday Correspondent 30.9.90, p.37

<sup>101</sup> C. Lasch, The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1995.

<sup>102</sup> Time Out Film Guide, Penguin Books, 1993, p.726.

<sup>103</sup> A. W. Murray, Scotsman Weekend 11/8/90, p.iii.

<sup>104</sup> C. Lasch, op.cit., p.31.

the daily struggle for survival than the comforts of existence associated with the middle class. This *mise-en-scene* is brought into play by the downward social mobility of the central protagonists. Yet the ambiguous class identity of Ripley, Murphy/*RoboCop* and Quaid/Hauser (or rather, their condensation of different class identities) also allows the spectator a fantasy of *upward* social mobility, thereby escaping the (vividly portrayed) constraints of the audiences' own class position. Whether this means being equipped with the cultural/educational endowments to be a leader (*Aliens*); to be well positioned in society to be a significant and important agent in bringing about progressive change (*Total Recall*); or have a memory of a comfortable middle class existence (*Robo Cop*).

For British spectators watching Hollywood's dystopian films the contrast with British film culture's representation of a static class structure is striking. The lack of cultural resources to imagine social mobility is indicative of the way, for example, the upper middle classes rarely become impoverished, at most economic decline is figured as eccentricity; while upward social mobility for the working class is almost always figured as a loss of roots and identity (the production within a cultural text of the *embourgeoisement* theory popular in sociological discourses).

If the coherence, unity and sense of moral purpose of the middle class has fractured, generating dystopian anxieties vis-a-vis the struggle between capital and labour, a cultural bifurcation in the middle class may account for the conflicting utopian structures of feeling already identified: bourgeois and post-bourgeois.<sup>105</sup> This cultural bifurcation concerns a struggle around the value and implications of that plebianisation of culture noted earlier by Jameson.

Lasch and Urry mobilise Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* to analyse the emergence of a new fraction of the middle class.<sup>106</sup> The *habitus* is a class based classificatory scheme for the flexible but structured organisation of behaviour and taste. Thus the *habitus* is produced and helps reproduce social stratification. The *habitus* organises the accumulation and strategic

<sup>105</sup> R. Samuel noted in the mid-1980s how a "far-reaching cultural revolution...has exposed the middle classes to competing models of behaviour and has broken their unity as a political bloc." See "The Lost World of British Communism" *New Left Review* 154, Nov/Dec 1985, p.14.

<sup>106</sup> S. Lasch and J. Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism* Polity Press, Cambridge, 1987, pp.292-293.

use of cultural capital, i.e. the competences and predispositions to consume particular cultural artifacts in particular ways. It is this cultural capital which has fractured the middle class vertically as it were. Urry identifies a post-bourgeois grouping within the middle class as being located primarily around media and symbolic production/consumption, where popular culture and fashion and immediate gratification are more important than respectability and deferred pleasure.<sup>107</sup> As with Lasch and Urry, so for Clarke, such groupings within the middle class invest heavily in a culture of fragmentation and recombination. Disruptive of convention (thus distinguishing it from the cultural conformism of the traditional middle class), international in its cultural reference points, deploying “a variety of postmodern cultural practices” and enthusiastic in its celebration of popular culture,<sup>108</sup> this mode of cultural consumption indicates a significant shift in the cultural capital of at least sections of the middle class. At the same time a strong rearguard defence by an older more established cultural capital, worried particularly about the erosion of questions of value, judgment and hierarchy, has been conducted across the various media.<sup>109</sup>

I have argued that the material contradictions for the middle class vis-a-vis the capital-labour conflict, has urgently raised the “vulgar” question: which side are you on? I have also suggested that the cultural bifurcation within the middle class also turns on the question of high culture vs popular culture; how to respond to the presence of the masses in mass culture. It might be thought that those fractions of the middle class willing to embrace popular culture are likely to also be those fractions most likely to baulk against their role as co-ordinators for the circuits of capital while those fractions of the middle class still wedded to more traditional cultural hierarchies are most likely to resist anti-capitalist positions. However, we are in the peculiar and paradoxical situation where those who celebrate elements of the post-bourgeois world now emerging, the cultural radicals, are politically quite acquiescent in the face of capitalism’s vigorous and unequal re-structuring of life. On the other hand, cultural conservatives,

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<sup>107</sup> J. Urry, The Tourist Gaze Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies Sage, London, 1990, p.91.

<sup>108</sup> J. Clarke, New Times and Old Enemies op.cit., p.107

<sup>109</sup> See for example Henry Porter’s lament to the death of the intellectual and of literature in the face of mass culture in The Guardian 2 1.2.96, pp.2-3. There is also a revealing bibliography for traumatised readers to seek succour, including titles by Richard Hoggart and George Steiner.

such as Lasch, confronted with the demise of their bourgeois culture in the face of global markets, have been forced to adopt positions of anguished dissent from the dominant political priorities. I want to now turn to explore these cultural/political positions in more detail. Representing the cultural radicals who have become, relative to their political traditions, increasingly conservative, will be the group of commentators gathered around the 'New Times' / Marxism Today project. Representing a cultural conservative who has undergone political radicalisation relative to his political traditions, is the British professor of politics, John Gray. The brief mapping out of their respective traditions will help clarify further the cultural and political contradictions of the period.

### **Cultural Radicalism and Politics**

Ideas around a newly emergent culture with radical possibilities, was associated in the 1980s with Marxism Today, the intellectual journal of the Communist Party. This monthly magazine was edited by Martin Jacques and intellectually dominated by academics and journalists, many of whom were not Communist Party members. The most important figure in fleshing out the magazine's theoretical position was Stuart Hall.<sup>110</sup> The journal set itself the task of reworking the theoretical methods and political values of the left, claiming that the success of Thatcherism signalled profound and epochal shifts in the material and cultural foundations on which socialism and its aspirations, had rested. In the late 1980s, the journal launched its 'New Times' project. This attempted to theorise the possibilities for a new progressive politics that would prise Thatcherism away from the emergent trends which had been identified, in order to give them "a progressive shape and inflexion."<sup>111</sup>

The important point here is the role the New Times analysis gave to popular culture and identity as a crucial site for the struggle for political allegiances and alliances. Yet while the Conservatives had for the 1980s at any rate, constructed a hegemonic position around authoritarian populism, for progressives, the "problem of hegemony in the age of the postmodern"<sup>112</sup> as

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<sup>110</sup> J. McGuigan, Cultural Populism Routledge, London, 1992, pp.33-42

<sup>111</sup> S. Hall and M. Jacques, "Introduction" in New Times: The Changing face of Politics in the 1990s (eds) S. Hall and M. Jacques, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1989, p.15.

<sup>112</sup> S. Hall and F. Jameson, "Clinging To The Wreckage" op.cit., p.30.

Stuart Hall saw it, was that culture and identity had become so fragmented. For Hall, this meant in turn that “the social forces themselves are so divided and subdivided around different projects that it’s not possible to see any single overarching programme that could unite them.”<sup>113</sup> For his part, Jameson is concerned about “the reconstruction of a certain basic unity among groups”, but is far too apologetic about this, wondering if he is “old-fashioned” and concluding that he is “more pessimistic about a purely cultural politics than I would obviously like to be.”<sup>114</sup> This is an issue which I will take up in some detail in the chapter on diasporic travels, where I will argue against the widespread reduction of consciousness (what Jameson has called cognitive mapping) to cultural identity and insist that Jameson’s intuitions concerning the drawbacks of a “purely cultural politics” need developing.

Thatcherism’s ability to revivify the category of the consumer and its attendant individualism as a central plank in policy decisions, made understanding the importance of the field of consumption and its links with identity formation a key political task. The deregulation of credit notwithstanding, the New Times analysis identified changes in the sphere of production, distribution and consumption to understand the new vectors between identity, politics and consumption. It was argued that new technologies were encouraging a shift away from the standardised mass production and mass consumption of goods and services, characterised by Fordism.<sup>115</sup> Instead, production and distribution was now geared towards niche marketing, customisation and the general promotion of diverse taste groupings in which difference becomes more important than sameness.<sup>116</sup> As Hall puts it:

“new regimes of accumulation, much more flexible regimes founded not simply on the logic of mass production and of mass consumption but on new flexible accumulation strategies, on segmented markets, on post-Fordist styles of organization, on life style and identity-specific forms of marketing, driven by the market, driven by just-in-time production, driven by the ability to address

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<sup>113</sup> S. Hall and F. Jameson, *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> S. Hall and F. Jameson, *ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> S. Hall and M. Jacques, “Introduction” *op.cit.*, p.33-34.

<sup>116</sup> J. Clarke, New Times, Old Enemies *op.cit.*, p.156.



not the mass audience, or the mass consumer, but penetrating to the very specific smaller groups, to individuals, in its appeal.”<sup>117</sup>

It was argued that the new orientation towards heterogeneous consumption could democratise the workplace, flattening hierarchies and increasing lateral (rather than vertical) communication flows in the interests of fine tuning products for the newly emerging differentiated markets. Yet as is so often the case with the accumulating use of the prefix ‘post’ (in this case post-Fordism), the continuities with what has been are stronger than the apparent breaks with the past. As my analysis of the component parts of the representation of the *Nostramo* indicates, capitalism is characterised by combined and uneven development. As Michael Rustin noted in his critique of New Times,

“Routinisation and mechanisation may be pushed to their limit at one end of the production process, whilst a self motivated and interactive style of work group is deemed functional at the other.”<sup>118</sup>

Yet even in the case of the latter set of social relations, surveillance and control of the ‘work group’ lies with capital, as the omniscient Company (with its spies and secret direction of events) in *Alien* suggests. As Rustin drily observed, the 1980s was “an odd time to be debating the obsolescence of class.”<sup>119</sup> Interestingly, Gallup polls have found increasing numbers of respondents giving an affirmative answer when asked if they thought there was a class struggle in Britain. 48% answered yes in 1964, while 79% answered yes in 1991.<sup>120</sup> Class relations do indeed appear to be more *figurable*, to use Jameson’s term, than at other times in the post-war period.

Nevertheless, a connection was drawn between this post-Fordist regime of accumulation and a weakening of the collective solidarities and “block” identities which had underpinned support for the main political parties, particularly Labour. In fact we have been here before. Just as embourgeoisement theories in the 1960s saw the Fordist provision of white

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<sup>117</sup> S. Hall, “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity” in *Culture, Globalization And The World System, Contemporary Conditions For The Representation Of Identity* (ed) A.D. King, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991, p.30.

<sup>118</sup> M. Rustin, “The Trouble With New Times” in *New Times* op. cit., p.319

<sup>119</sup> M. Rustin, *ibid*, p.310.

<sup>120</sup> N. Abercrombie, et al, *Contemporary British Society* op.cit., p.169

goods and the privatisation of leisure as weakening the values of collectivism and solidarity, <sup>121</sup> so it was that post-Fordism appeared to signal a new although different kind of individualism. <sup>122</sup>

Stuart Hall argued that the “maximisation of individual choices through personal consumption” also brings with it a “revolution of the subject”. The old bourgeois subject as critiqued in Lacanian psychology and Althusserian Marxism, imagined itself as whole, centred, stable, complete, responsible for the generation of its own identity. As Fredric Jameson remarks, this,

“is not some mere conceptual error, which can be dispelled by the taking of thought and by scientific rectification: it has quasi-institutional status, performs ideological functions, and is susceptible to historical causation...” <sup>123</sup>

Post-Fordism provided a theory of historical causation which burst asunder the old monadic subject while post-structuralist theories, from Foucault, to Derrida to Lyotard, provided the philosophical underpinnings to a rather different notion of self, conceptualised as more fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple selves or identities in relation to the different social worlds (or discourses if one wants to stress the rhetorical ‘turn’) the subject inhabits. <sup>124</sup> Media culture is seen as crucial to the fostering of this new post-bourgeois identity, permitting, Urry argues “an extraordinarily heightened availability of social situations, events, myths and images which cohere and ‘construct’ diverse ‘subjects’...” <sup>125</sup> Marxist cultural theorists like Kracauer and Benjamin once saw bourgeois culture and self conceptions being (potentially) undermined by the new sites of *collective* media production and consumption. <sup>126</sup> Even Jameson sees the dissolution of the old monadic subject as the harbinger of new collectivities. The New Times analysis however sees the old individual subject being undermined by new modes of identity formation that somehow, in an interesting ambiguity,

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<sup>121</sup> N. Abercrombie, et al, Contemporary British Society op. cit., p.155.

<sup>122</sup> C. Leadbeater, “Power To The Person” in New Times op.cit., called for a “progressive individualism” as a left or possibly social democratic response to this, pp.137-138.

<sup>123</sup> F. Jameson, The Political Unconscious Routledge, London, 1989, p.153.

<sup>124</sup> S. Hall, “The Meaning of New Times” in New Times op.cit., pp.119-120.

<sup>125</sup> J. Urry, “The End of Organised Capitalism” in New Times op.cit., p.102.

<sup>126</sup> M. B. Hansen, “America, Paris, the Alps: Kracauer (and Benjamin) on Cinema and Modernity” in Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life (edS) L. Charney and V. R. Schwartz, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995, pp.378-379.

manage to be both fragmented and yet recontained within the category of the individual. On the basis of some partial tendencies in niche-marketing, themselves separated from the continuing provision of mass culture in both the software (eg Total Recall, etc) and the hardware (televisions, VCRs, compact disc systems), "New Times" as a theory, seemed to take the long standing dream of consumer capitalism, that consumers imagine "their commodity dream world to be uniquely personal (despite all objective evidence to the contrary)," <sup>127</sup> as both real and new.

It was not only new conceptions of the individual subject which were emerging, but also collective identities along the axis of gender and 'race' other than the white male which had been the left's traditional (although far from exclusive) constituency. We have already seen that the problematic of the organic community was neither gender or 'race' neutral. It helped marginalise women and people of colour insofar as it contributed to the corporatist imaginings of the post-war labour movement. Gender and 'race' became increasingly important concepts across the disciplines, but often at the expense of class which was seen to be irredeemably conflated with the white male.

The presence of new constituencies other than class underpinned the celebratory and upbeat tone of the New Times analysis, but often at the expense of evacuating any critical perspective on capitalism as an exploitative and morally unjustifiable structure. <sup>128</sup> By contrast, the films discussed display a much more anxious structure of feeling in their visions of capitalism's organised power and its continued pursuit of the profit motive over human need. As Judith Williamson has argued in discussing Hollywood's images of business in such 1980s films as *The Secret of My Success* (1987) and *Working Girl* (1988),

"...it has been Hollywood which has done what the British left and independent film scene on the whole failed to do: channel and express a real popular moral and spiritual indignation at capitalist values." <sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> S. Buck-Morss, op.cit., p.260.

<sup>128</sup> J. Clarke, New Times, Old Enemies op.cit., pp.160-168.

<sup>129</sup> J. Williamson, " 'Up Where You belong': Hollywood images of big business in the 1980s" in Enterprise and Heritage, Crosscurrents of National Culture (eds) J. Corner and S. Harvey, Routledge, 1991, pp. 160-161.

## Cultural Conservatism and Politics

In contrast to the culturally radical but politically conservative shift which marked sections of the left in their response to Thatcherism and globalisation, John Gray is a culturally conservative figure who has been forced into 'radical' opposition against the prevailing economic and social trends. In the mid 1980s, as market discipline was being applied to the mining communities, Gray wrote a largely uncritical exposition of the free market guru, Hayek.<sup>130</sup> By the early 1990s, there is a shift to a concern with culture and values as the implications of neo-liberalism's dismembering of the superstructures becomes increasingly evident. Specifically, Gray becomes anxious that marketisation paradoxically dissolves the very institutions whose job it is to legitimate the market.<sup>131</sup> The context of this shift is not only the second recession of the Thatcher period, nor the fall of Thatcher herself in 1990, but the wider global forces which lock Britain into competition with Japan and the East Asian tiger economies. There, a dynamic capitalism demonstrates its compatibility with political authoritarianism and non individualist cultures inimicable to western liberalism.<sup>132</sup> Its success poses a threat to the cultural and political values Gray holds dear. As Alan Carling notes, the forms of "common life" whose future Gray is concerned about, remain conservative, embodying "an Anglican landscape of church and family and school."<sup>133</sup>

Security of employment is also one of the forms of "common life" that Gray finds valuable. However, by the 1990s political commentators have recognised how job insecurity has crept into middle class occupations. Downsizing "strip[s] out whole layers of employment from organisations, replacing them by new information technologies or by 'outsourcing' from contract workers."<sup>134</sup> Such processes are transforming "our entire culture of work" making, "the prospect of a job for life an historical memory. It has destroyed the idea of a career or a vocation on which our inherited culture of work was founded."

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<sup>130</sup> J.Gray, Hayek on Liberty Blackwell, Oxford, 1986.

<sup>131</sup> A. Carling, "Prosperity, Autonomy and Community: John Gray on the Market, Politics and Values" in Imprints, vol. 1, 1996, pp.32-33.

<sup>132</sup> Carling, *ibid*, pp.40-41.

<sup>133</sup> Carling, *ibid*, p.44.

<sup>134</sup> J. Gray, "Casualties of the carousel" The Guardian 27.4.95, p.24.

That reference to an “inherited culture of work” is positively Leavisite in its evocation of an organic community. Thus implicitly, when Gray goes on to argue that work is not just a source of income but “the principal source of our social identity,” one feels that he has in mind, above all, male identity. The themes of the organic community (and its decline) discussed in the previous chapter are well to the fore, as Gray worries that,

“the match between the development of a career and the phases of the human life-cycle breaks down. We are then unable to tell any coherent narrative about ourselves in which our working life tracks the cycle of biological aging. Our lives become fractured, formless and permanently provisional.” <sup>135</sup>

Here, in the dystopian vision of fractured, formless and provisional identities, Gray explicitly rejects the very features of life which postmodernism and the New Times analysis celebrates, or at least, sees as potentially progressive. Of course, the New Times analysis could quickly reply that Gray’s argument is no more than special pleading for a traditional male identity. Certainly Gray does not interrogate the historical and ideological roots which have made employment and occupation central to the formation of male identities. <sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, this hardly mitigates his critique of market forces.

Yet Gray’s argument is locked into an irreconcilable contradiction. He admits bluntly that bourgeois life is being undermined by globalised free markets. <sup>137</sup> He continually calls for policy makers to forge the institutions which would make the market meet human needs even as the evidence mounts that this project is untenable. A question therefore emerges which Alan Carling has posed in relation to Gray’s thinking.

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<sup>135</sup> J. Gray, *ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> D. H.J. Morgan, *Discovering Men* Routledge, 1992, pp.76-77.

<sup>137</sup> J. Gray, “The discreet demise of the bourgeoisie” in *The Guardian* March 29, 1997, p.22.

“[i]f a person has to choose between capitalism on the one hand, and a culture (or values) which capitalism used to uphold but is now set to destroy, then a person rooted in the culture (ie a conservative) presumably has to become anti-capitalist. Are aspects of Gray’s twists and turns to be understood as ways of avoiding this final step?” 138

It is this dilemma which sums up one set of the contradictions at the heart of the science fiction films which I have been referencing. These texts, like Gray’s thought, have, in part, an investment in the culture of conservative commonality which capitalism “used to uphold but is now set to destroy”. This therefore poses the question of choosing “between capitalism” and the culture in question, a choice which produces the “twists and turns” (what I called earlier, the textual mutilations) designed to avoid “this final step.” And arguably, this is also true for the audience as well. However, before I turn to examine these texts in more detail, the sociological analysis that I have mapped out needs to be conjoined with one which discusses the psychical implications of social change and contradiction. This is important if we are to track the social contradictions into spectator positions on offer via these films.

### **The Family and the Frankfurt School**

Both Aliens and RoboCop are fundamentally concerned with the family and how its internal workings have been reshaped by advanced capitalism. Similarly, the Frankfurt School theorists were concerned to map the historical and social factors structuring the family. Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse saw the family as playing a vital role in mediating the relationship between society and the individual psyche. The Frankfurt School theorised the psychological and social implications of the weakening of the Oedipus complex in the formation of the individual *within* the “cellular family unit.” 139

Prior to monopoly capitalism, the individual’s negotiation of the Oedipus complex was personally and intimately nuanced by the context of *their*

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138 A. Carling, op.cit., p.42.

139 F. Jameson, Marxism and Form Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1971, p.109.

particular family, Marcuse argued.<sup>140</sup> While this individuated psychical trajectory initiates the formation of subjectivity within the social and symbolic order, it is also, because of its personal nature, more likely to leave “a sphere of private non-conformity”<sup>141</sup> than is the case today. Marcuse argues that in the 20th century of monopoly capitalism, this individuated psychical development has been “prematurely socialised by a whole system of extra-familial agents and agencies.”<sup>142</sup> Forces such as the mass media, the state, commodity relations and economic crisis displace the father whose, “authority as a transmitter of wealth, skills, experiences, is greatly reduced.”<sup>143</sup> As the father’s “image of power and strength as an authority figure is shattered”<sup>144</sup> so the personal interplay of acquiescence to and antagonism with the father is absorbed by social agencies (the law, the culture industries) directly connected to the logic of the social order. Thus the superego, that internalisation of authority, idealism and morality has, under monopoly capitalism, “loosened from its origin” in the father, who is gradually “superseded by more exogenous images”<sup>145</sup> of authority. These exogenous images are scaled up versions of masculinity, ‘super-fathers’ who are more authoritarian than the real ‘weak’ fathers they have replaced.<sup>146</sup> This then accounts for one half of the law/desire polarity which Thatcherism taps into. But what about desire?

The libidinal aggressiveness intrinsic to the Oedipal situation is redirected away from authority and onto those groups and individuals who can be framed as “threats” to the individual and the social order they are obedient to. The flip side of this is that the ego becomes increasingly narcissistic. Having failed to develop any adequate autonomy, it becomes dependent on introjecting the images and icons of the social order to shore up a sense of self. This twin combination of narcissism (for example, identification with the idealised egos of the culture industry) and aggression directed to “outsiders” signals that the ego is fragmenting and regressing back into the unconscious as the latter is directly tapped and manipulated by the cultural

<sup>140</sup> H. Marcuse, Eros and Civilisation A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud Ark, London, 1987, p. 96.

<sup>141</sup> H. Marcuse, *ibid*, p.97.

<sup>142</sup> H. Marcuse, *ibid*.

<sup>143</sup> H. Marcuse, *ibid*, p.97.

<sup>144</sup> A. Elliott, Social Theory and Psychoanalysis in Transition: Self and Society from Freud to Kristeva Blackwell, Oxford, 1992., p.59.

<sup>145</sup> H. Marcuse, *op.cit.*, p.95.

<sup>146</sup> D. Held Introduction to Critical Theory, Horkeimer to Habermas Hutchinson & Co, London, 1980, p.132.

and state agencies of the social order.

It is no accident that the Frankfurt School critique re emerges in the 1980s. As we have seen, this is a period of pronounced authoritarianism and demonisation of various 'others' which threaten the New Right project. This political situation was combined with the unleashing of consumerism via relaxed credit controls, niche marketing or customisation facilitated by new technology and the growing importance of the media and marketing in oiling the wheels of exchange. All of which suggested that the narcissistic culture had reached its apotheosis. Christopher Lasch, who had made a similar case in the late 1970s for the bourgeois family of yester year as had the Frankfurt School, <sup>147</sup> developed his thesis concerning the narcissistic self just as the New Right project was about to consolidate itself. <sup>148</sup>

While postmodernism celebrates the fragmenting individual, seeing in its breakup the possibility of new modes of identity, the Frankfurt School critique, as with John Gray, mourns the fragmentation of the individual as a loss of autonomy, agency and rational self knowledge. As with Gray's position, the Frankfurt School critique, particularly as it manifested itself in Lasch's work, is profoundly nostalgic as Jessica Benjamin noted, "for old forms of authority and morality." <sup>149</sup> The inability to perceive how the demise of the "bourgeois family" might open up emancipatory possibilities, for women and possibly for men as well, is just one weakness in this critique. I will explore this in particular in relation to Aliens. Jessica Benjamin's work offers us a much needed contemporary feminist inflection to the Frankfurt School's critique, and we shall return to it shortly.

Another problem is that just as the critique depends on overestimating the family's cultural and economic autonomy in preceeding centuries, so it exaggerates the collapse of parental authority in the 20th century. The infant's early stages of development remains overwhelmingly determined by its immediate carers, while in the later development of the child the parents

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<sup>147</sup> C. Lasch, Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged Basic Books Inc, New York, 1977. Lasch argued that "in earlier times the family passed along the dominant values but unavoidably provided the child with a glimpse of a world that transcended them, crystallized in the rich imagery of maternal love" p.xvii.

<sup>148</sup> C. Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism Norton and Co., New York, 1980.

<sup>149</sup> J. Benjamin, The Bonds of Love, Psychoanalysis, feminism, and the problem of domination Virago, London, 1991, p.139.



remain an influence in forging values which may or may not be resistant to the social order. Another problem is that there can be no pre-determined psychical response to the family's integration into an increasingly systematised but crisis prone economy. The clash between the ideology of autonomy and the deeper ontological levels of integration into the economy may produce a range of responses, not least hostility to those harsh economic forces which rupture the subject's perception of familial and individual autonomy. I will explore this in relation to Robo Cop in particular.

A further difficulty in the Frankfurt School critique is that a certain functionalism occludes any appreciation of the contradictory role of the culture industries in this situation. The very nostalgia which the film texts display for the same identities whose loss the Frankfurt School implicitly mourns, while at the same time displaying a certain excitement about new cultural/technological possibilities, suggests that these films, and therefore the relationship between texts and spectators, is profoundly contradictory. As we shall see, Total Recall is a good example of such tensions.

Finally and perhaps most significantly, it is questionable whether the conflictual formation of the individual via the Oedipus complex has been replaced by a seamless (narcissistic) unity between the subject and agencies of the social order. The Frankfurt School argue that an authentic process of individuation once depended upon the real position and power of the actual father. Yet in their attempts to situate the psyche historically, their argument collapses back into the kind of positivism which they were so critical of. As David Held notes:

"A strong case can be made that, for Freud, it is less the *father in reality* (the actually strong or weak man) and more the *symbolic father* that is crucial for the passage of the Oedipus complex." <sup>150</sup>

However, too strong an assertion of the primacy of the symbolic father runs the risk of collapsing back into the universal and a-historical arguments which often underpinned Freudian theory and which the Frankfurt School were so concerned to reformulate. I would argue that it is the complicated overlaps and disjunctions between the empirical and symbolic father,

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<sup>150</sup> D. Held, Introduction to Critical Theory op.cit., p.372.

between lived experience and cultural myths, which allow us to think of the Oedipal complex as both pervasive and contingent. For example, the empirical father's very powerlessness in the world of work and civil society may make his symbolic power within the family all the more important for him while at the same time calling his authority into question.

This dialectic between the apriori acceptance of authority and its prohibitions on the one hand and aggression/resistance towards it on the other, is fundamental to many "exogenous" images of the culture industries. This is particularly true of Hollywood cinema. Its heroes and heroines are constructed as powerful ego ideals but typically in some kind of conflict with the established social order. They are both omnipotent but threatened with powerlessness. They are both insiders and outsiders whilst the spectator's psychical aggression is often ambivalently directed at both "outgroups" (eg aliens, criminals) as the Frankfurt School argued, but also, reflecting the outsider status of these ego ideals, aggression is frequently directed towards social authority itself (business corporations for example).

If the methodology is problematic, the Frankfurt School's ambition, to trace how changes in capitalism and the state "reverberate in the individual's inner being" <sup>151</sup> is admirable. The themes they are dealing with are clearly resonant and this is evident not just in the film texts themselves but in audience studies. Valerie Walkerdine's discussion of how a working class family watches *Rocky II* on video is relevant here. <sup>152</sup> In particular she focuses on the father's identification with the character of Rocky. Here we have an introjection of an omnipotent ego-ideal whose very allure resides in the way that power is constantly tested, threatened, and struggled for. <sup>153</sup> Insisting on the class specific aspects of this masculinity, Walkerdine notes that "[f]ighting and power/powerlessness therefore seem to me especially related to an experience of oppression...of a constant struggle not to sink, to get rights, not to be pushed out." <sup>154</sup> Acutely reflexive of her own position as a middle class intellectual, Walkerdine notes that the meaning of "fighting" in this working class context, is not the same as it is in a middle class household (and therefore the critical reception of such "macho" films

<sup>151</sup> C. Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* op. cit., p.4.

<sup>152</sup> V. Walkerdine, "Families, Films and Fantasy" in *The Media Reader* (eds) M. Alvarado and John O Thompson, BFI, London, 1990, pp.339-357.

<sup>153</sup> V. Walkerdine, *ibid*, 344.

<sup>154</sup> V. Walkerdine, *ibid*, p.351.

will be class specific). Walkerdine discusses fighting as a metaphor for the way the family see their relationships to work (the mother is a shop steward) and civil society (the parents' conflicts with the education authorities) and notes how "totally consonant" it is with its presentation in Rocky II.<sup>155</sup> Fighting is the metaphor and the means by which Rocky's narrative of struggle and success, from outsider to insider, is constructed. This struggle is not simply the struggle for material success and individual achievement, it is also the fight of a small man in a big world to become valued and respected in the domestic sphere.

Here Walkerdine links the consumption by the father with his need for the feminine (against which his identity is defined and given purpose through his role as 'protector' and 'provider') but also his fear of the very Other which defines him; the feminine as a signifier of dependency and powerlessness.<sup>156</sup> Thus the exogenous images of the culture industry do not block the Oedipal complex but proliferate the resources through which class and gendered notions of the self and its relationship to the family and the social order are worked through. Ambivalent as this mode of identification is, we should note that Rocky II both roots itself in popular(ist) consciousness (the little man against the world) while also attempting to shore up the authority of the father/symbolic order. Thus structurally, this Hollywood text has some similarity with the authoritarian populism of Thatcherism. It was up to Thatcherism to turn/articulate such structural homologies between itself and popular culture, to its political advantage.

### **Feminism And The Family**

Constance Penley's brief discussion of Aliens follows other commentators in seeing it as a conservative film, an example of 'Reaganite entertainment'. Penley notes that traditional signifiers of sexual difference are under threat as men and women become less differentiated by the division of labour. This seems to me to be an essential starting point for any discussion of the science fiction genre during the 1980s. Penley argues that in contrast to the "stunningly egalitarian" Alien, the sequel "cracks under the strain of trying to keep to the very original *lack* of sexual differentiation in its precursor."

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<sup>155</sup> V. Walkerdine, *ibid*, 350-351.

<sup>156</sup> V. Walkerdine, *ibid*, p.350, 352.

157 Thus in Aliens at least, Penley argues, the very pressures which are undermining traditional notions of difference result in a film which renews its investment in just such traditional notions. It is worth quoting Penley at length:

And Ripley is, again, the bravest and smartest member of the team. But this time there is a difference, one that is both improbable and symptomatic. Ripley 'develops' a maternal instinct, risking her life to save the little girl who is the only survivor of a group of space colonists decimated by the aliens. Tenaciously protective, she takes on the mother alien, whose sublime capacity for destruction is shown nonetheless to result from the same kind of maternal love that Ripley exhibits. Ripley is thus marked by a difference that is automatically taken to be a sign of femininity. (We do not see Hicks, for example...acting irrationally in order to rescue a child who is probably already dead.) Aliens reintroduces the issue of sexual difference, but not in order to offer a newer, more modern configuration of that difference. Rather, by focusing on Ripley alone (Hicks is awkwardly 'disappeared' from the film in the closing moments), the question of the couple is supplanted by the problem of the woman as mother. What we get finally is a conservative moral lesson about maternity, futuristic or otherwise: mothers will be mothers, and they will *always* be women." 158

Some questions: Why are Ripley's maternal feelings 'improbable', by what criteria are they so judged? Are they criteria which suggest that she cannot be brave, smart *and* show "maternal" feelings? Are these feelings explicable only in terms of sexual difference or is something else at stake, a concern, an anxiety about the nature of advanced capitalism? Is Penley in danger of defining Ripley's actions as 'irrational'? The evidence Penley offers to suggest that this is a definition the film makes is weak. Hicks willingly follows Ripley's lead in searching for the little girl, at least until he is injured. But in what sense is Hicks "awkwardly 'disappeared'" from the film? The implication seems to be that "the question of the couple" would have been more challenging than "the woman as mother." Why? Is not the question of

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157 C. Penley, "Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical Dystopia" in fantasy and the cinema BFI, London, 1989, p.205.

158 C. Penley, *ibid*, p.206.

the couple far more familiar territory? Is the woman as mother intrinsically reactionary, and what are the political implications of this assumption when for millions of women, being mothers is important? Does it matter that Ripley is coded as a single mother? Penley's last sentence is confusingly expressed. She is surely asking not will mothers always be women (what else could they be, men?) but will women always be mothers? This is an important question but the meaning of mothering in the film needs to be addressed. I will suggest that it is premised on a quite conservative and traditional investment in women/motherhood/family as a bulwark against a socioeconomic order which cannot accommodate care, love, solidarity, etc. Yet at the same time, the film recognises that the traditional configurations of gendered difference are in fact under enormous pressures from that very socioeconomic order and here we do glimpse a *new social content* within the older form of the private family.

Here the work of Jessica Benjamin is crucial and deserves a higher profile than it has achieved. For Benjamin the key problem of the age is not narcissism <sup>159</sup> and the proper response to the problems of society is not a nostalgic defence of the Oedipal complex which Lasch and the Frankfurt School attempt. On the contrary, some of the key presuppositions of the Oedipal complex are alive and well and flourishing under neo-liberalism: they are, individualism, gender polarity, the split between subject and object and the denial of mutual recognition and the refusal of what Benjamin calls, an intersubjective space (a refusal also emulated by postmodernism with its theory of incommensurate languages).

The Oedipal ideal of individuality "excludes all dependency from the definition of autonomy" <sup>160</sup> by equating the formation of individuality with the male's *separation* from the mother. The emphasis on a gloriously autonomous individual must then necessarily construct a split between (dominant) subject and (dominated) object. The former fails to recognise themselves in the latter or finds such recognition profoundly disturbing. As Benjamin says:

"In breaking the identification with and dependency on the mother, the boy is in danger of losing his capacity for mutual recognition

<sup>159</sup> J. Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love* op.cit., p.136.

<sup>160</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.162.

altogether. The emotional attunement and bodily harmony that characterised his infantile exchange with mother now threaten his identity.”<sup>161</sup>

Of course, access to this particular kind of identity formation has been profoundly unequal, with the male enjoying privileged rights to be “recognised in one’s desire...an agent who can will things and make them happen”<sup>162</sup> while women seem to lack desire, subjectivity, agency.<sup>163</sup> This produces what Benjamin terms, gender polarity (male=active/female=passive). This polarity leads to the breakdown of mutuality and the refusal of what Benjamin calls, an intersubjective space, where the subject meets and recognises another subject.<sup>164</sup>

This psychical dynamic is then hooked up to a defence of capitalist property and power relations. The split between the subject and object and the domination of the latter by the former, a split in which, need, nurture, dependency, collective mutuality are denigrated, is woven into the basic, most fundamental economic unit of our times: the commodity form:

“A worker sells his [sic!] labor power in exchange for a wage; but his labor produces more value (surplus value) than that wage; and this surplus is appropriated by capital and wielded as power.”<sup>165</sup>

The only place where a very unequal quasi-intersubjective space can be institutionalised in society is the family. Gender conservatives see in the family the values of socialisation, care and nurture which they are determined to ensure must *not* be extended to the public world.<sup>166</sup> Punitive law and order agendas and the attack on the welfare state are only the most obvious examples of this. Socialised public nurturing is demonised (communism!) and seen as unaffordable. Care, nurture and mutuality is “considered private, and not truly relationships with outside others.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.76.

<sup>162</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.102.

<sup>163</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.87.

<sup>164</sup> J. Benjaim, *ibid*, p.25.

<sup>165</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.186.

<sup>166</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.201.

<sup>167</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.197.

This institutionalisation of the Oedipal complex (separation = individuation) means that the greater presence of women in public life, while an important egalitarian goal, does not of itself challenge this male logic. Talk of the feminisation of public life (see Nine To Five (C. Higgins, 1980) is likely to prove disappointing in practice. At the same time, in the context of globalisation:

“The ideal of autonomous individuality with its stress on rationality, self sufficiency, performance, and competition, threatens to negate the mother so completely that there may be no one to come home to.” 168

### Aliens

There are in fact two versions of Aliens in circulation. The original release and the subsequent video both excised material directly relating to the family which a subsequent ‘director’s cut’ release included. The extended version includes a scene in which Ripley finds out that while she has been drifting through space for fifty-seven years, her daughter has died, aged sixty-six. The scene begins with Ripley sitting on a ‘park’ bench, looking at simulated countryside scenery. She switches it off just before Burke, the Company man, arrives and shows her a photograph of her aged daughter (now dead), older than herself. It’s a poignant dramatisation of how globalisation separates the family, not only in spatial terms, but temporally too, as ‘natural’ time has been disrupted by Company time. The simulated country side scenery suggests the alignment of the family with nature and the impossibility of both in the world of the diegesis.

Marx argued in The Communist Manifesto that capitalism “has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.” 169 In the original version of Aliens the family cannot be figured at all, except the unorthodox substitute family that Ripley gathers around her during the second half of the film. It is as if the domination of money relations pushes the family beyond symbolisation (the negation of the mother Jessica Benjamin warns about). This pressure is precisely what transforms the terms by which gender is represented in the film. This is made clear by the transformation of Rebecca,

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168 J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.205.

169 K. Marx and F. Engels, The Communist Manifesto Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1985, p.82.

a “pretty little girl” as Ripley describes a photograph of her from her ‘former’ life, into the self reliant, more androgynous Newt, after her family has been destroyed by the aliens. At the same time, some kind of family unit has to be reconstructed as the only space in which the nurturing values of care, compassion and solidarity can flourish. Ripley is the key figure here as both the narrative agent for such a reconstruction and as a paradigm of the renegotiation of gender identity which this requires.

During her debriefing by the Company, Ripley is unable to persuade her interrogators of the existence of the alien and therefore the necessity of destroying the Nostromo (worth \$42 million, adjusted). Once again Ripley is partially proletarianised as the Company punishes her by revoking her flight license. As a result she ends up working in the cargo docks, but as the debriefing session closes, she asks the Company to investigate the planet on which the Nostromo originally found the alien. It is at this point that she and we learn that the planet is already in the early stages of colonisation. When Ripley asks how many people are on the planet, the reply is “66 to 70 families.” Cue close up on Ripley as she reiterates the key word, “families, Jesus.” Taubin cites this scene as evidence of the film fetishising the nuclear family.<sup>170</sup> Certainly the film has a huge investment in a family structure (the last and only space it can imagine some alternative to the values of capitalism) but it is only ambivalently committed to *the* family, as we shall see.

After Ripley’s meeting with the Company, the film in its extended version cuts to LV426. The subsequent scenes demonstrates further how the family has become a mere extension of the Company and its ‘money relations’. The representations are drawn from the image bank of frontier capitalism, a zone which popular culture already figures as having a weak or non existent civil society and where family and work are coextensive. Indeed the faint echoes of the western genre are there in the last stand of the colonisers against the aliens’ attack on base camp. This attack happens offscreen but is referred to when the marines first arrive and survey the signs of the battle. What we do see on LV426 is base camp in operation. We find out from a conversation between two characters in the control room that a ‘Mom and Pop’ survey team have been sent out to check a grid reference. They in turn have asked control whether they will be able to claim any thing

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<sup>170</sup> A. Taubin, Sight and Sound July 1992, vol.2, number 3. pp.8-10.



they find out there even though the grid reference was provided by the Company (by Burke we find out later on). At the end of this introduction, one of the characters spys some children playing near the control room. He yells at the children to get out because they know that the area is off limits to them. Cut to the children scampering away, one on a pedal bike with a huge 'W' corporate logo on the front of it. As the kids disappear around the corner, the camera pans (thus the film foregrounds the link between capital and family) to a sign for the Weyland-Yutani Corporation, underneath which is a slogan, "Building Better Worlds."

In the next scene we are introduced to Rebecca/Newt and her family, the 'Mom and Pop' team who are checking out the grid references for the Company. This is how the colonisers come across the ship on which the alien eggs are stored. The last image of the scenes from LV426 is of Rebecca screaming when her father returns from the ship with an alien attached to his face. When we next see her, the scream as a signifier of a helpless femininity has been replaced by a quiet, resourceful, independent figure.

The destruction of the family via its subordination to capital opens up the space for a renegotiation of gender. Ripley is the paradigm of this renegotiation but she is carefully marked off from Vasquez whose renegotiation of gender identity (her complete identification with work) leaves no space for the film's other project: reconstituting some sort of family structure. In the scene where the crew first awake from suspended animation, Vasquez, with her cropped hair, combat shorts and sleeveless teeshirt showing off her muscular body as she exercises, nods towards Ripley and asks who "Snow White" is. The question condenses a triple differentiation between herself and Ripley along the lines of gender, ethnicity and class. The representation of the marines is drawn from the genre of the war film, particularly the Vietnam war film, with its characteristic emphasis on the small group (the company or platoon). Caught in hostile territory, the war film subjects masculinity, class and ethnic identities and relations to extreme pressure and often to some kind of ideological modification. The same is true in Aliens. Vasquez must at the moment of her death relinquish her appropriation of Hispanic machismo and accept the help (ineffectual as it is), of Lieutenant Gorman. However, she is less humiliated than some of the other male marines. Hudson jokes

with Vasquez as she does her exercises, asking if she has ever been mistaken for a man. "No," she answers, "have you?" It is a prophetic response since Hudson, initially all bravado ("I'm the ultimate badass") reveals the fragility of his "white trash" masculinity becoming near hysterical when the marines are routed by the aliens. He is briefly allowed to regain his version of masculinity before his death. Lieutenant Gorman meanwhile is stripped of his authority once his inexperience, indecisiveness and class remoteness from his troops is revealed. He is further emasculated by concussion before regaining a shred of masculinity by helping and ultimately dying with Vasquez.

By their very difference ( and their failure to survive) these characters help define why Ripley is the film's heroine. In her character there is a 'settlement' - from the start and not at the point of death - between masculinity and femininity and between classes, which makes her the film's preferred point of sustained audience identification. The basis of a class alliance is laid before the team even reach LV426. Just as Ripley went below decks in Alien, striking up an "uneasy alliance" with the black worker, Parker,<sup>171</sup> so she goes to the loading bay to find the marines and volunteer for work. This simultaneously differentiates her from the Company (Burke) and military authority (Gorman). The sergeant and Hicks greet Ripley's offer with scepticism, but they are duly impressed when she reveals and demonstrates that she can operate the exoskeleton used for loading cargo. With Hollywood's characteristic economy, the scene also introduces the machinery that allows Ripley to engage in close combat with the Mother Alien at the film's conclusion. The protective shell which the exoskeleton provides links the film to the hardening of the body more fully developed in Robo Cop.<sup>172</sup> In Aliens, the class and gender roots of this cultural seme (manual/machine operated/manufacturing 'hard' work) are clearly being attached to Ripley. A shot-reverse-shot between Hicks and the sergeant, smiling with renewed respect, laughing with surprise, and Ripley, operating the loader, sutures the spectator into this transference of class identity. At the same time the response of the marines and the self conscious incongruity of Ripley and the exoskeleton also reaffirms a residual WASP identity, not least through an intertextual relationship with the star image

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<sup>171</sup> J. H. Kavanagh, "Feminism. Humanism and Science in Alien " op.cit. p.75

<sup>172</sup> J. Williamson, The Guardian 11/10/90, p.26.

of Sigourney Weaver herself.<sup>173</sup>

It is reconciliation between classes which enables Ripley to emerge as the 'natural' leader of the group once Gorman's position is revealed to be based on class status rather than merit, and Burke's pecuniary motives become evident. Ripley's bi-class identity makes her perfectly suited as the point of identification for a class differentiated audience. As we have seen, the mid-1980s had seen the entrenchment of Thatcherism and with it the unravelling of the social, political and economic consensus of the post war period. In this context, the middle classes were increasingly faced with a stark choice between aligning themselves with the classes above them or aligning themselves with the classes below them. We can speculate that for those viewers who identify themselves in this position, Ripley functions as an imaginary alignment against the agenda of capital, breaking with the function of coordinator which, as we have seen, Clarke argues is the role of the middle classes in administering the "circuits of capital". Yet Ripley never becomes integrated into the group, a possibility foreclosed by the group's rapid destruction, which in turn may help preserve (for the middle class spectator) a certain class distinction.

Ripley is both of the people (which facilitates identification) while also being set apart from them. Yet while the middle class spectator can read this difference as class difference, the working class spectator can read Ripley's 'difference' as a utopian embodiment of meanings which transcend the limitations and constraints of class relations. Obviously this transcendence is politically ambiguous, its radical possibilities merging with its regressive collapse into individualism. As the narrative progresses, we can detect a shift away from the anti-capitalist and anti-authoritarian implications of the narrative. Instead there is a shift towards a more individualist, Darwinian mode compatible with the dominant political context of Thatcherism.

This possible map of reading positions for British audiences is then further complicated by the question of gender identities. One way of reading Ripley's motivation and actions is to reinscribe them within the sphere of the domestic and maternal, as these reviews suggest.

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<sup>173</sup> This image is well to the fore in a film like The Year of Living Dangerously (1982) with Weaver playing the coolly distant assistant to the British (significant class associations there) military attache.

“As the commandos...fall like flies, it falls to the women to confront the Mother-monster.” 174

“Miss Weaver is a delectable heroine, tough but sexy and with a nice maternal streak.” 175

“Jane Fonda’s Barbarella with a Ph.D in assertiveness training.” 176

Of course, who else would confront the monster, but the women, once it is defined as a horrific mother? Ripley’s toughness and assertiveness meanwhile can be accommodated as long as she is good to look at, at least as good as previous “space kittens” and there is something comfortingly domestic (“nice”) about her concern for others. Some kind of compensation is going on here (for the male spectator) and this can be linked to sociological work in the mid-1980s which found strong resistance from men to the challenges which established gender identities were undergoing.<sup>177</sup> However, because masculinity is contradictory, there are other readings available to the male spectator as we shall see. Firstly though, we need to acknowledge that if there is some kind of compensation going on, then the film itself is generating the *need* for such compensation. What are the implications of this for the female spectator?

In RoboCop and Total Recall the darker flipside of the post-bourgeois identities which the films clearly at one level celebrate, is their integration into the agenda of corporate capitalism, hence the holding out of bourgeois norms as a closure to those films dystopian anxieties. In Aliens, as we have seen, it is the traditional family, with its bourgeois gender identities, which the film worries is too close to corporate capital. In opening up a gap between the family and capital, the film contemplates the possibility of imagining a non-patriarchal family. The wounded Hicks (the substitute father) we should remember, is sedated through the climactic last twenty minutes of the film. Bishop, the android is cut in two and no more than a

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<sup>174</sup> What's On, 4.9.86, p.90.

<sup>175</sup> Glasgow Herald, 13.9.86, p.10.

<sup>176</sup> Village Voice, 22.7. 86, p.52.

<sup>177</sup> A. Ford, Men Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1985. Ford argued “that men from all classes, ages and backgrounds were willing to fight powerful rearguard actions to defend the traditional male and female roles.” pp.297-298.

helpless spectator in the final conflict between Ripley and the Mother Alien. Significantly Newt is a girl rather than a boy, so Ripley cannot be read as shoring up the patriarchal order by preserving the next generation. If we remember that one of the significant forces changing the nature of the family from the 1980s on, was the influx of women into the labour force, it is possible to read the maternal signifiers around Ripley (chiefly her interaction with Newt) not only as compensation (for the male spectator), but as a *dramatisation* of the tensions between family and work which women were and are increasingly facing. As I indicated earlier, the class profile of expanding female labour was both a minority influx into the professions and a majority influx into the low-wage, part-time/short term economy: the profile exactly crystallised in Ripley's ambivalent bi-class identity. The fact that Ripley is not Newt's biological mother however, testifies to a continuing blockage in uniting the terms 'mother' and 'independent women' together.

If this reading is open to the female spectator, there may also be reasons why it may be open to the male spectator as well. Generically, Ripley has close affiliations with the figure of the 'Final Girl', the subject of an important analysis of the horror movie by Carol Clover.<sup>178</sup> Clover offers a multifaceted account of how the Final Girl functions as an "agreed upon fiction" in order to negotiate gender anxieties. For example, for a largely male audience, the Final Girl may function as a culturally acceptable vehicle for identifying with a character who (initially) lacks the phallus (with terrifying results) and then subsequently realises her incipient masculinity in banishing the monster.<sup>179</sup> However, Clover also wonders if this is not only just a "deflective convenience" but also "a kind of imaginative curiosity about the feminine in and of itself."<sup>180</sup>

I think this is possible and that we can give a definite social content to this form of imaginative curiosity about the feminine. In discussing the sociology of everyday life and its antithesis, the heroic mode, Mike Featherstone maps out the deeply entrenched divisions of labour of western culture:

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<sup>178</sup> C. Clover, Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film BFI, London, 1993, pp.35-41.

<sup>179</sup> C. Clover, *ibid*, p.53.

<sup>180</sup> C. Clover, *ibid*, p.55.

“The everyday world is the one which the hero departs from, leaving behind the sphere of care and maintenance (women, children and the old), only to return to its acclaim should his tasks be completed successfully. A basic contrast then, is that the heroic life is the sphere of danger, violence and the courting of risk whereas everyday life is the sphere of women, reproduction and care.” 181

We need only have to look at how difficult popular culture finds it to represent male characters that have any intimate relation with the domestic and *not* be emasculated, to see that this division between the heroic and the everyday is deeply entrenched in popular cinema. At the heart of this binary opposition is a contradiction: the everyday functions as the *raison d'être* of the heroic mode which in turn can only define itself as heroic by operating outside the everyday. Given then that the hero must distance themselves from any intimate interaction with the everyday, (the sphere of children and care, of mutuality in Jessica Benjamin's terms) we can see what kind of investments a cross-gender identification with Ripley might offer the male spectator. As Alistair White has argued:

“...at the heart of man's fractured consciousness lies a decisive split: a contrast between love and work. If men seek a love that has little to do with work it is because their work has so little to do with love.” 182

The implication of this is that while for the female spectator, the Ripley-Newt relationship may dramatise the *tensions* involved in reconciling work and childcare, for the male spectator, at least comparatively, it offers a vicarious experience of reconciliation between the heroic and the everyday, between man's “fractured consciousness”. Indeed, the male spectator's customary relationship to the domestic sphere and mother-child relations has a surrogate point of reference in Hicks and his ‘outsider’ relationship to the Ripley - Newt axis. When the latter is separated from her new ‘parents’ as she slips down a chute, it is to Ripley that she repeatedly cries for help and it is Ripley's voice which Newt hears in return. Yet the mother and daughter bond is not configured within a pre-Oedipal Imaginary and Hicks

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181 M. Featherstone, “The Heroic Life and Everyday Life” in Cultural Theory and Cultural Change SAGE/TCS, London, 1992, p.165.

182 A. White, The Guardian 2 June, 10th, 1990, p.17.

does not initiate either of them into the patriarchal Symbolic order.<sup>183</sup> It is Ripley who finds Newt in a kind of pre-Oedipal condition, almost without language, instinctual and asocial and it is Ripley who coaxes her back into the Symbolic. But, as I have argued, this is a significantly restructured Symbolic order, one marked by history's vicissitudes and contradictions in which alternatives to capitalism and patriarchy can be glimpsed.

We are now in a position to understand the significance of the Alien Mother within the film as a symptom of its internal dissonance. In a sense, the links which the film constructs between the Company and the aliens bears some similarity with the juxtapositions of nature with historical developments which Walter Benjamin observed in the photomontages of John Heartfield. In Heartfield's work, Benjamin detected a dialectical constellation of "natural history" which called the social order into question rather than comfortingly asserting the legitimacy of the social order by linking it to the natural world. Susan Buck Morss describes the approach that Benjamin formulated (and which was to be influential on Adorno) thus:

"The method relies on juxtaposing binary pairs of linguistic signs from the language code (here history/nature), and, in the process of applying these signs to material referents, crossing the switches."<sup>184</sup>

In the case of Aliens, the savagery to be found in the world of nature (the primal aliens) which has had no taming by the social world is "crossed" with the savage nature of advanced capitalism in which all aspects of nature (including birth, the body, care, even whole worlds) must be dominated, exploited and brought under the sign of the commodity and its technologies. However, the film's commitment to "crossing the switches", making the links between the Company and the aliens, falters as the narrative progresses (the dispatch of Burke helps ensure this). Ripley's fight with the monsters becomes increasingly 'personal' (she calls the Mother Alien a "bitch"), increasingly privatised around the family while the destruction of

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<sup>183</sup> Compare for example E. Ann Kaplan's discussion of Now Voyager where the mother and daughter bond is represented as a failed or stalled socialisation. Thus the daughter is effectively awaiting the intervention of the man to complete the daughter's Oedipal trajectory. In "Motherhood and Representation: From Postwar Freudian Figurations to Postmodernism" in Psychoanalysis and Cinema (ed) E. Ann Kaplan, AFI/BFI/ Routledge, London, 1990, p.131.

<sup>184</sup> S. Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing, op.cit., pp.59-60.

the marines ensures that their anger against their betrayal by the Company hardly has time to ferment into class conflict. If the traditional family, with its 'Law' of the father is too close to the omniscient law and logic of the Company, then the narrative can be read as trying to piece together and imagine what a non-patriarchal set of domestic relations might look like in the interests of establishing some space where the law of profit and loss does not run. Certainly the film cannot imagine establishing that space *outside* the family, and so figures like Vasquez, with her strong identification with work and solidarity to the group, a potentially more revolutionary figure than Ripley, cannot figure in the film's 'solution'.

The separation of the aliens and their predatory quality from their associative links with the Company and the climactic battle between Ripley and the Mother Alien are all *narrative* strategies by which the hopes and anxieties of the collective unconscious are being tapped into and then deflected onto an unruly "outsider", posited as threat with the kind of libidinal aggressiveness which the Frankfurt School analysed. In this case, the "outsider" is nature itself, and more specifically, the organic reproductive capacity of woman herself. Now, this is the tenor of an influential analysis of the "monstrous feminine" by Barbara Creed which I will come to in a moment, but it is worth noting Walter Benjamin's point that: "The high point of a technical arrangement of the world lies in the liquidation of fecundity."<sup>185</sup> The organic autonomy of women's reproductive capacity is therefore a threat to capitalism and not just patriarchy.

Nevertheless, despite the film's retreat to the private family in the final conflict between Ripley and Mother Alien over Newt, I would still argue that *this* family is not the traditional patriarchal family of old. In other words, while the form of the film's solution to its narrative problem is bourgeois, the private space is now filled with a *new social content*. This goes against the critical consensus on the film. Part of this though, I suspect, is a reflection of the middle class tastes dominating critical discourses. Much of the criticism of Ripley's adoption of guns and technology to fight the monster, is reminiscent of the misunderstanding of the meaning of "fighting" which Walkerdine observes in her ethnographic analysis of Rocky II's consumption in a working class household. We have also seen Penley dismiss the Ripley-Newt axis, but this may say more about a particular

<sup>185</sup> W. Benjamin, quoted in S. Buck Morss, Dialectics Of Seeing, *ibid*, p.99.



middle class feminist ambivalence to motherhood than it tells us about how other audiences might be reading this component of the film.

The judgment against the text also comes from an influential theorisation of the monster by Barbara Creed. She sees the monster as the “feminine” made monstrous when viewed through the optic of patriarchy.<sup>186</sup> Thus Ripley’s assault on the Alien Mother in her reproductive lair (a “dark and slimy” interior, “alive with rows of follicles and eggs”) must, logically, be read as her co-option into a patriarchal fear of the capacity of women to generate life.<sup>187</sup> Creed’s analysis of the *imagery* in Alien and Aliens (vaginal openings, bodily interiors, the womb, birth) is quite close to Walter Benjamin’s point about the threat which women’s fecundity poses to the “technical arrangement” of life under capitalism, but I am not sure that her image orientated analysis can capture the shifts, tensions and contradictions of the narrative *process*, and therefore the range of spectator positions available to audiences. Again, the Ripley-Newt relationship is largely played down. One reason for this might lie in the theory of the pre-Oedipal mother that is being mobilised, a theory which tends to focus attention on the relationship between characters and the monster and downplay relations *between* characters.

Marcuse noted that the subject’s separation from the mother and initiation into the social and symbolic order via the Oedipus complex, retrospectively reinterprets the lost maternal unity as a threat to the individual, “the threat of “maternal engulfment” by the overpowering womb.”<sup>188</sup> Creed, like Marcuse, tends to accept the patriarchal binary opposition which casts the pre-Oedipal or archaic mother as a site of “the undifferentiated”, “the place where meaning collapses”.<sup>189</sup> The Oedipal trajectory then, is linked with the struggle of the child to break free from the mother.<sup>190</sup> What is different is that the *evaluation* is reversed and the pre-Oedipal mother is celebrated as a force that can disrupt the terms of that separation, the borders and boundaries which structure patriarchy (the blurring of established

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<sup>186</sup> B. Creed, The Monstrous-Feminine, Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Routledge, London, 1993.

<sup>187</sup> B. Creed, *ibid*, p.51.

<sup>188</sup> H. Marcuse, Eros and Civilisation *op.cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>189</sup> B. Creed, *op.cit.*, p.10.

<sup>190</sup> B. Creed, *ibid*, p.11.

boundaries is also of course a key theme in postmodernism).<sup>191</sup> The problem with this is its implicit political implications. While the boundaries of gender and sexual difference, the borders of “inside” and “outside” of “clean” and “dirty” which underpin patriarchy can be buffeted by latent pre-Oedipal forces, the process of individuation, of forming into a human subject that can operate within the social world, comes to be seen as the sole preserve of the Oedipal complex. This does not leave much room for the subject to act within any historical causation on the social world in relation to other subjects.

This lack of an *intersubjective* dimension to psychoanalysis has been questioned by Jessica Benjamin. The significance of Benjamin's orientation to the question of intersubjectivity is that it allows us to think through the links between the intrapsychic approach which dominates psychoanalysis (the id, the ego, the superego) and social relationships; i.e. the links between the individual's unconscious and the collective unconscious. On its own the intrapsychic approach leads analysis into an a-historical impasse, where the subject is locked into a timeless struggle with the unconscious (thus despite her discussion of vaginal openings, there is one C-word Creed never uses in her discussion of the Alien films: capitalism). How can one really register the impact of such historical phenomena as the rise of the single working mother within such a theoretical framework? On the other hand, the conflation between separation and individuation reinforces “our culture's high valuation of individualism.”<sup>192</sup> The mother-child relationship thus becomes something of an embarrassment to feminism - as is detectable, I think, in Penley's response to the Ripley-Newt relationship.

For Jessica Benjamin, the pre-Oedipal relationship with the mother is not to be thought of as pure fusion and non-differentiation. She argues that even here, a more complex dynamic of recognition of self and other, presence and absence (eg of the breast) is incipient. What is clear is that the firmly delineated boundaries of masculine and feminine, of subject and object, are not yet in place. There is a greater merging and blurring of identities and this subsequently becomes threatening once the subject has traversed the Oedipal complex. For Jessica Benjamin the pre-Oedipal phase

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<sup>191</sup> See also B. Creed, “From Here To Modernity: Feminism And Postmodernism” in Screen, vol.28, no.2, 1987.

<sup>192</sup> J. Benjamin, The Bonds Of Love op.cit., p.25.

is a prototype of intersubjectivity in which care and nurture, mutuality and dependency are first experienced within fluid boundaries before being suppressed (in public life) or compartmentalised (in the family) by the passage through the Oedipal complex. It seems to me that it is precisely the reconstruction of such an intersubjectivity (what Penley found “improbable”) which is glimpsed in the Ripley-Newt relationship and which much film criticism of Aliens has missed. The family is, in that well known phrase which is the title to one of Lasch’s books, a haven in a heartless world. This ideal (no matter how divorced it may be from reality) I believe sums up one of the main ways people relate to the family. Jessica Benjamin’s analysis allows us to both understand the gender inequalities which structure that haven (rather than uncritically defend it) and its complicity with the divisions of labour (male/female, public/private) which help reproduce that heartless world, while also understanding the genuine utopian feelings which the family articulates.

### **Robo Cop and Total Recall**

Robo Cop is a satire on the prevailing discourses of free markets and privatisation. But if the film is a European joke at the expense of the New World, as Simon Hoggart, writing from America suggests, it strikes a chord with the British context precisely to the extent that the Old World is following the economic values of the New. As Hoggart notes, the film’s plot involves a police force which has “been privatised with results even less satisfactory than British Telecom.”<sup>193</sup> Even in a right wing paper like The Times the film reviewer could note that there were limits to the commodification of society and that in Robo Cop those limits had been crossed: “[p]rivatisation has run mad.”<sup>194</sup> New Musical Express offered a more universal condemnation of laissez faire economics, writing of the “corporate corruption at the heart of a privatised morality.”<sup>195</sup> while from a more wistful liberal position, Derek Malcolm thought the film had “few illusions about the ultimate triumph of big business over a purer future.”<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> S. Hoggart, The Observer 30.8.87, p.19.

<sup>194</sup> The Times, 4.2.88 p.16.

<sup>195</sup> New Musical Express, 6.2.88, pp.24-25.

<sup>196</sup> D. Malcolm, The Guardian 4.3.88 p.15.

On several occasions the film features what one might call 'newsverts', ostensibly to set the scene or contextualise the narrative events, but also functioning to signify the commodification of the media. The affirmatory glow which advertising gives to its products thoroughly suffuses the news reports and the demeanour of the news anchors, comically inappropriate next to the disastrous content of the news. The contamination of information by commerce is made explicit by showing the news to be peppered with adverts: a privatised healthcare offering a new heart "with extended warranty"; or a simulation war game for all the family called "Nuke 'Em".<sup>197</sup> In the first of these examples, the penetration of the body's physical interiority by capital is alluded to, anticipating the substantial restructuring of body and mind that Murphy is to undergo. The second advert demonstrates how the crises which capitalism generates (even the final nuclear apocalypse) is merely an opportunity to create another market, another set of commodities, just as social polarisation becomes the opportunity for the expansion of privatised security services. As Marshall Berman noted, for capitalism, "[c]atastrophes are transformed into lucrative opportunities for redevelopment and renewal." <sup>198</sup>

The dialogue of Robo Cop is also saturated with the language of commodity relations. Both corporate figures and criminals use the same discourse of markets, money and product, they even use the same aphorisms ("good business is where you find it"). Not only are actions and motivations defined in such terms but people as well. Robo Cop himself is defined by others as a commodity. Morton, described by one reviewer as a "wonderfully unctuous future-yuppie" <sup>199</sup> tells Murphy's ex-partner, Lewis, that Robo Cop does not have a name because he's product. Morton's rival in the Security Concepts division of Omni Consumer Products (OCP) is Dick Jones who tells Robo Cop that he is "product" and that "we can't very well have our own product turning against us." As these examples suggest, the ubiquity of commodity relations would appear to dismember the autonomous monad and subordinate them to corporate agendas.

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<sup>197</sup> The blurring of the distinction between television programming and advertising is very much a 1980s "postmodern" phenomenon. See the discussion of MTV in S. Jhally, The Codes Of Advertising, Fetishism And The Political Economy Of Meaning In The Consumer Society Routledge, London, 1990, pp.96-97.

<sup>198</sup> M. Berman All That Is Solid Melts Into Air , Verso, London, 1993, p.95.

<sup>199</sup> New Musical Express, 6/2/88.

However, this critical dystopian perspective on the rule of capital is contradictorily combined with that fascination and excitement concerning the dynamics between capitalism, technology and identity which underpinned the New Times analysis. I have already mentioned this ambivalence in relation to the figure of Robo Cop - simultaneously dehumanised and yet empowered by the interface of technology and human identity. This ambivalence is also evident in Paul Verhoeven's Total Recall. On the one hand the extensive penetration of commodity relations into nature underpins corporate power and exploitation. On Mars, Cohagen controls the very air which people breathe. Significantly, the only way the film can offer a fantasy /utopian escape from such commodity relations is through the alien Martian technology which lies outside human commodity relations. It is this technology, the capacity to transform Mars' atmosphere, which Cohagen wants to keep secret, since to activate the technology, which lies outside private property, would destroy the commodification of air and thus his control over the inhabitants. The film may be cautiously seen as a quasi-Marxist parable about how the development of the forces of production comes into contradiction with social relations that construct scarcity in order to maintain exchange value. Once the technology is activated in the film's climactic battle, there follows the massive spectacle of the (alien) forces of production transforming nature (the planet's inhospitable atmosphere) and thereby creating the dawn of a new and just social order.

On the other hand the film, inspired by Philip K. Dick's We Can Remember It For You Wholesale, is clearly fascinated by the way the commodification of nature, in this case memory, foregrounds identity as a construct which can be reconstructed. In a kind of parody of the avant-garde, this revelation appears to offer the subject the chance to reconstruct themselves, not through revolution, as the Russian Constructivists imagined it, but through buying and selling in the marketplace.<sup>200</sup> The nascent ur-consumerism which Benjamin studied in the Paris of the late nineteenth century, has as its terminus the image of Quaid on the train travelling to work, surrounded by monitors with adverts on them. But not only is his external public space dominated by the forces of commerce, his internal psychical space is now open for commodification as well. The

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<sup>200</sup> T. Eagleton, "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism" in Against The Grain Verso, London, 1986, pp.131-132.

seductions which Total Recall Inc are offering is the chance to buy the memory of a vacation to Mars, a vacation his wife does not want to take for real. Lifestylism, niche-marketing, individuated consumption increasingly bypasses even the micro social relations of the family in its bid to access and shape individual fantasy, desire and narcissism. However, the tensions between Quaid and his wife which this generates are foreclosed because the memory implant fails. Quaid, his life and his wife, is already a fictitious construct. "If I'm not me who the hell am I?" Quaid asks his "wife."

Compared to Verhoeven's two films, Aliens, for all its hesitations, is a much more serious attempt to imagine a post-bourgeois identity principally around gender. Both Robo Cop and Total Recall are limited in this regard because they are anchored firmly within traditional relations and tensions structuring masculinity and femininity. The stronger utopian impulse in these films is to shore up, not transcend, bourgeois gender relations. Hoggart, noted of Robo Cop that,

"castration anxiety which runs through the film...is the result of a matriarchal society where the old masculine skills are no longer in demand...the notion of masculinity in peril permeates the whole film." 201

The term "matriarchal society" seems to locate women as responsible for the socio economic shifts which have made certain masculine skills redundant. More plausibly the restructuring of capitalism by capital was closely associated with Reaganomics and in the UK, Thatcherism. Hoggart's misrecognition of cause is indicative of how the notion that masculinity is in crisis, is problematic. Bea Campbell notes that the riotous decades of the 1980s/90s show "how unemployment *reveals a mode of masculinity* where as the common sense notion has been that it *causes a crisis of masculinity*." 202 The distinction is useful. The notion of a crisis in masculinity tends to accept that men need work because it is essential to *their* identity (where for women, the implication goes, it just means earning a wage) and that it is the prime means of harnessing male energy to social purpose. The notion of a mode of masculinity however allows us to see a socially integrated masculinity and an a-social masculinity as two sides of the same coin. The

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201 S. Hoggart, The Observer 30.8.97 p.19.

202 B. Campbell, Goliath Methuen, London, 1993, p.202.

only difference is that an a-social masculinity has lost any links it once had to Featherstone's everyday world via the family. As far as women are concerned, their subordination is what defines both paradigms for men and their masculinity. Women are either in their place or threatening and dangerous. The more the claim is made for masculinity being in crisis, the more the investment (as in Robo Cop) in traditional divisions of gender where women know their place.

The world of Robo Cop is certainly a threatening one for a socially integrated masculinity. John Gray's fears that corporate agendas allied with technological developments are transforming "our entire culture of work" in ways detrimental to a coherent and autonomous sense of self, are well to the fore.<sup>203</sup> There is also the confusing question of the entry of women into the labour force, with Murphy's partner, Lewis contrasting with his very home centred wife. The film's attitude to Lewis is perhaps summed up in the scene where, catching a black member of the crime boss's gang, urinating, Lewis is disarmed when she glances down at his penis.

The importance of the job for Murphy's sense of adequacy and for his status as a role model for his son is crystallised in an image drawn from the iconography of the western: the twirling of the gun in the hand. Murphy practices the trick, not very successfully, because his son watched a television robo cop perform the manoeuvre and asked him if he can do the same. Thus, as the Frankfurt School noted, the Oedipal trajectory is increasingly subject to "exogenous" images outside the family. Murphy's masculinity is scaled up to the masculine ideal but only at the cost of rupturing from the family. Outside the family but still haunted by memories of it, Robo Cop is in an ambivalent position vis-a-vis the social order: both its perfect masculine ideal as a symbolic father/agent of the Law but also in conflict with social authority and its Law. To be fair, the Frankfurt School recognised this conflict, but only saw it moving in a rightward, fascistic direction that broke down social democratic authority.<sup>204</sup>

The tensions between an integrated masculinity and an a-social one is an enduring one in popular culture. Laura Mulvey has analysed the splitting of

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<sup>203</sup> J. Gray, "Casualties of the carousel" The Guardian 27.4.95, p.24.

<sup>204</sup> T.W. Adorno, "Freudian theory and the pattern of fascist propaganda" in The Culture Industry: Selected essays on mass culture T.W. Adorno, Routledge, London, 1991.

the hero function in The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance ( John Ford 1962) in terms of a similar dichotomy and the spectator's resulting oscillation between "two points of attraction." <sup>205</sup> While James Stewart's character represents modernity through a masculinity rooted in the social authority of the Law, of education and of marriage, the text also has a huge investment in what Mulvey terms, a "nostalgic celebration of phallic, narcissistic omnipotence." <sup>206</sup> represented by John Wayne's character. It does not take much to convert Mulvey's narcissistic authority into the more historicized category of a masculine, a-social individualism which rejects mutuality in favour of self sufficiency. Robo Cop has the same double hero embodied in one character, but here there is some nostalgia for the James Stuart type of masculinity (i.e. one that can be reconciled with community) in the context of civilisation unravelling and thus requiring the narcissistic omnipotent masculinity of Robo Cop.

The further contradiction of course is that this a-social masculinity which is outside the law then becomes the agent for the reimposition of law and order. This itself may generate anxieties. In discussing a narcissistic identification with a surrogate on screen self that exudes power, mastery, omnipotence and control, Neale has noted that there is a concomitant masochism in the relations between the spectator and the image in so far as the identification with the ideal (super) ego which the film offers, may further provoke castration anxieties on the part of the spectator, reinforcing their powerlessness, their inadequacy. <sup>207</sup> We can give this insight a definite sociopolitical context by linking it to the masochistic relations at play in Thatcherism's 'authoritarian populism'.

I have indicated already that the question of law and order became a key issue as the social costs of *laissez faire* economics escalated. During the 1980s, the 'two nations' strategy of Thatcherism sought to consolidate an electoral base around a core group of skilled workers who could benefit from the rewards of the market, while constructing as other a peripheral,

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<sup>205</sup> L. Mulvey, "After thoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's Duel In The Sun (1946)" Visual and Other Pleasures Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1989, p.34.

<sup>206</sup> L. Mulvey, *ibid*, p.150

<sup>207</sup> S. Neale, "Reflections on men and mainstream cinema" in Screening the Male: Exploring masculinities in Hollywood Cinema S. Cohan and I. R. Hark, Routledge, London, 1993.



disenfranchised sector of the poor and unemployed.<sup>208</sup> This is literalised in Total Recall's vision of 'two worlds', where the mutant miners on Mars constitute the exploited periphery kept in line by violence and oppression. On Earth, Quaid a materially comfortable construction worker, watches the news which casts the mutants as terrorists. However, as I suggested, the increasing powers and role of the police in containing the social conflicts generated by the new deal for capitalism, caused considerable anxiety.

Again, there is a trace and displacement of this in Robo Cop. Robo Cop himself is carefully distinguished from the fully roboticised project pioneered by Dick Jones, Ed 209. This future in law enforcement is presented from the beginning as threatening, unreliable and dangerous as a demonstration goes badly awry and an OCP executive is shot to pieces. The function of Ed 209 in the film is to siphon off anxieties around the image of law and order which Robo Cop represents and relocate them around a figure which can be identified as a 'bad' object. Against Ed209, Murphy's struggle to realise his own humanity facilitates identification with what otherwise might be a problematic "hero".

## **Conclusion**

Implicit in my argument is that Hollywood cinema is no longer straightforwardly the utopian cinema it almost certainly once was for British spectators. It's utopianism is still there - and in other genres, very strongly, but now, for reasons specific to Hollywood's national context, but also perhaps because of a more generalised scepticism concerning capitalist progress, that utopianism is more ambivalent and compromised. How that gets translated into interpretative patterns within a British context of reception, is something this chapter has sought to explore.

Clearly Thatcherism provides a key frame of reference. Although successful electorally through-out the 1980s and early 1990s,<sup>209</sup> there is evidence that it was never as hegemonic as sections of the left, particularly around

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<sup>208</sup> B. Jessop, et al "Popular Capitalism, Flexible Accumulation and Left Strategy" in New Left Review 165, Sep/Oct 1987, p.105.

<sup>209</sup> Although there were differences in style and even policy issues (especially Europe) Major's tenure in office did not see any fundamental break with his predecessor's economic, social and moral/cultural values.

Marxism Today, claimed. <sup>210</sup> Politics was, and still is, driven by the assertion that there is no alternative to the market and while many if not most people assent to that ultimatum in practice, this does not mean an equivalent assent is granted to the ideology of the market. <sup>211</sup> Or, one may say the same thing and dialectically turn the practice/ideas couplet around, as Gramsci does when he argues that in his/her practice, labour demonstrates its collective identity “in the practical transformation of reality” while their consciousness, at least in part (Gramsci knows that consciousness is fissured) remains “historically opposed to his [sic] actions”, “inherited from the past” accepted “without criticism” and more or less influential in binding labour “to a certain social group” (Gramsci is of course here writing in prison and so cannot be too explicit about which group that may be). <sup>212</sup>

Thus British audiences would be fully receptive to the dystopian strands running through the films discussed whatever the electoral success of the Conservative Party and the rightward shifts of the Labour Party. The globalisation of capitalism, its ubiquity and pervasiveness in an age of privatisation, its colonising dynamic, its accessing of our minds and bodies, its absorption and commodification of nature, its hostility towards the individual subject’s autonomy and the family generally, are all cause for concern within these films. If fear and anxiety is one face of the commodity, as Benjamin and Adorno argued, then the multi-national corporate capitalism theorised by Jameson is very evident in these films. However, Jameson’s theory offers us an overly pessimistic picture of an integrated system, a closed system which “secretes” culture. Jameson’s functionalism here stems from his linear historical scheme in which modernism has been all but eclipsed by postmodernism.

The other face of postmodernism as it has been theorised, focuses more on

<sup>210</sup> The British Social Attitudes Reports found through out the 1980s strong resistance to many of the central tenets of Thatcherism. See The Guardian, 19.11.97, p.10.

<sup>211</sup> See N. Abercrombie, S. Hill and B.S. Turner, The Dominant Ideology Thesis Allen and Unwin London, 1980. The authors argue that the subject is pragmatically integrated into the social order by material practices (the “dull compulsion of economics”) and that at the level of consciousness, their integration is more weakly and contradictorily achieved. This split between effective material integration without an integration at the level of mind and consciousness is, I suspect, particularly true of the intelligentsia and explains the rise of such theoretical positions as Rortian irony and Lyotardian “language games”.

<sup>212</sup> A. Gramsci, “The Study Of Philosophy” in The Modern Prince and other writings Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1967, pp.66-67.

consumption, consumerism, the end of mass culture, the emergence of diverse cultures and the resulting plurality of identities and subject positions. This overly optimistic position, theorised most explicitly on the left by Marxism Today 's "New Times" manifesto, suffers from a one-sided analysis precisely because, like Jameson, it is wedded to a linear philosophy of history in which postmodernism displaces modernism. Thus it underestimates the anxieties and anger which a newly rampant capitalism was and is generating, while also downplaying the continuing importance of class relations.

Nevertheless, the New Times analysis identified progressive possibilities in the dissolution of established institutions and practices which the globalised market and technology wrought. It was thought that both a new conception of individual identity and new constituencies of previously marginalised collective identities (women, people of colour, gay and lesbian , etc) would provide the platform of a re-energised left politics. Some elements of this analysis could be detected in the films themselves, particularly in relation to women and the family in Aliens and in a more attenuated and certainly less progressive mode, in the role of the media and new technology in the formation of identities in Robo Cop and Total Recall.

In providing a political matrix in which to situate these films and their reception, I also explored the contradictions within the New Right and especially the tensions between a commitment to neo-liberal economics on the one hand and bourgeois cultural values on the other. It is interesting that the cinematic incarnations of ideologues for free market capitalism are always negative. However, the Hollywood films are much more committed to articulating in a positive manner discourses which represent a return to bourgeois values. This bourgeois structure of feeling is very evident in the representations of the family, in gender relations and in the denouements of the films in question. Certainly such a structure of feeling has a purchase on people across the class spectrum although I suggested that both the main characters within the films and within critical discourses were articulating a fissure within the cultural capital of the middle classes. Figure One summarises the dystopian and utopian dialectics which I have mapped in my discussion of the three films.

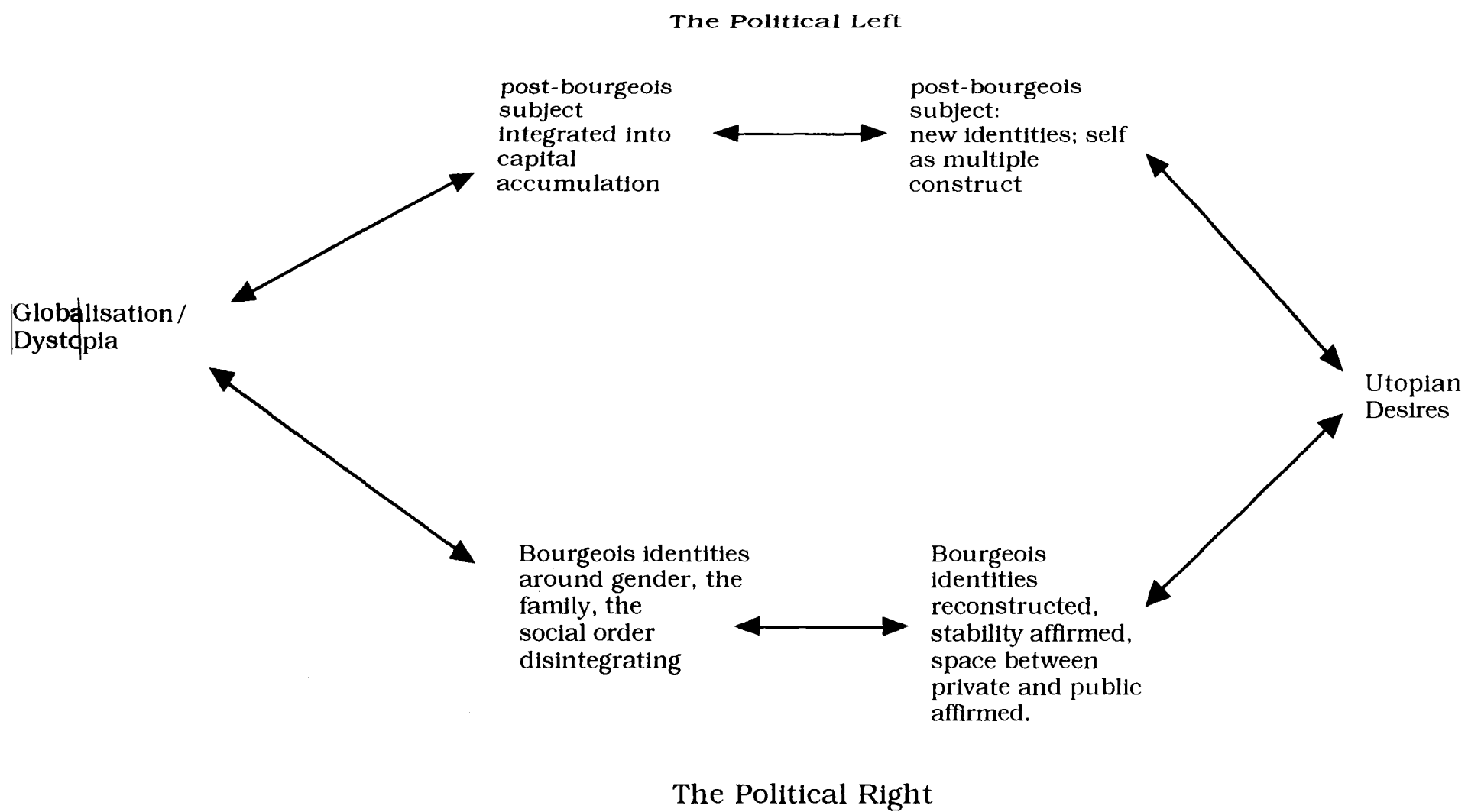


Fig One: Dystopian and Utopian Dialectics

The importance of psychoanalysis in contemporary theory required an engagement with the psychical dynamics of spectatorship which I left undeveloped in the previous chapter. The importance of the family within this historical context suggested an engagement with the Frankfurt School. Within this position Adorno and Marcuse argued that an increased predisposition to authoritarianism can be traced to the transfer of identification from the family and the father to extra-familial agencies directly connected to the preservation of commodity relations, particularly the culture industry. The result is narcissism, that is an increasing dependence on the idealised egos of the culture industry, which also encourages aggression towards “outsiders” as compensation to an underdeveloped ego. After noting some sociological and psychoanalytic problems with this position, I go on to suggest that the culture industries (a rather less monolithic conception), film in this instance, do not produce a seamless identification with social authority. The main points of identification are precisely characters who to some extent at least, are “outsiders”. Thus the films direct libidinal aggression *at* social authority, especially corporate and state social authority. Of course these films are compromise formations and as a narrative process, they aim to channel this aggression in ways that rescue the social order and reconnect the characters(s) and spectator identification to it. Walkerdine’s empirical audience research helped back this argument up and underlines the importance of the working class trajectory which the main characters have in these films.

Walkerdine’s discussion of the role of the feminine/domestic sphere for male identity led us to an engagement with feminism. If the Frankfurt School’s idealised defence of the Oedipal complex is problematic politically, sociologically and as a tool for cultural analysis, the dismissal by much contemporary feminism of the family and motherhood as intrinsically reactionary, is also problematic. Enter Jessica Benjamin. Her argument is that all the values of care, of dependency, of mutuality and nurturing which are expelled from the public sphere, are displaced onto the family. Yet the family is also the site where the Oedipal scenario, which Benjamin defines in terms of individualism and fear of mutuality, is internalised. Thus there is a further displacement (gender polarity) onto the female who must bear all the values of care and nurture, while contradictorily, the family trains the

individual to enter a world which tries to combine obedience to social authority with a lack of mutuality. The family then, for men and women, is a highly contradictory space and I tried to integrate these psychological dynamics into my analysis of spectatorship. As an example, Figure Two recaps the arguments around Robo Cop diagrammatically.

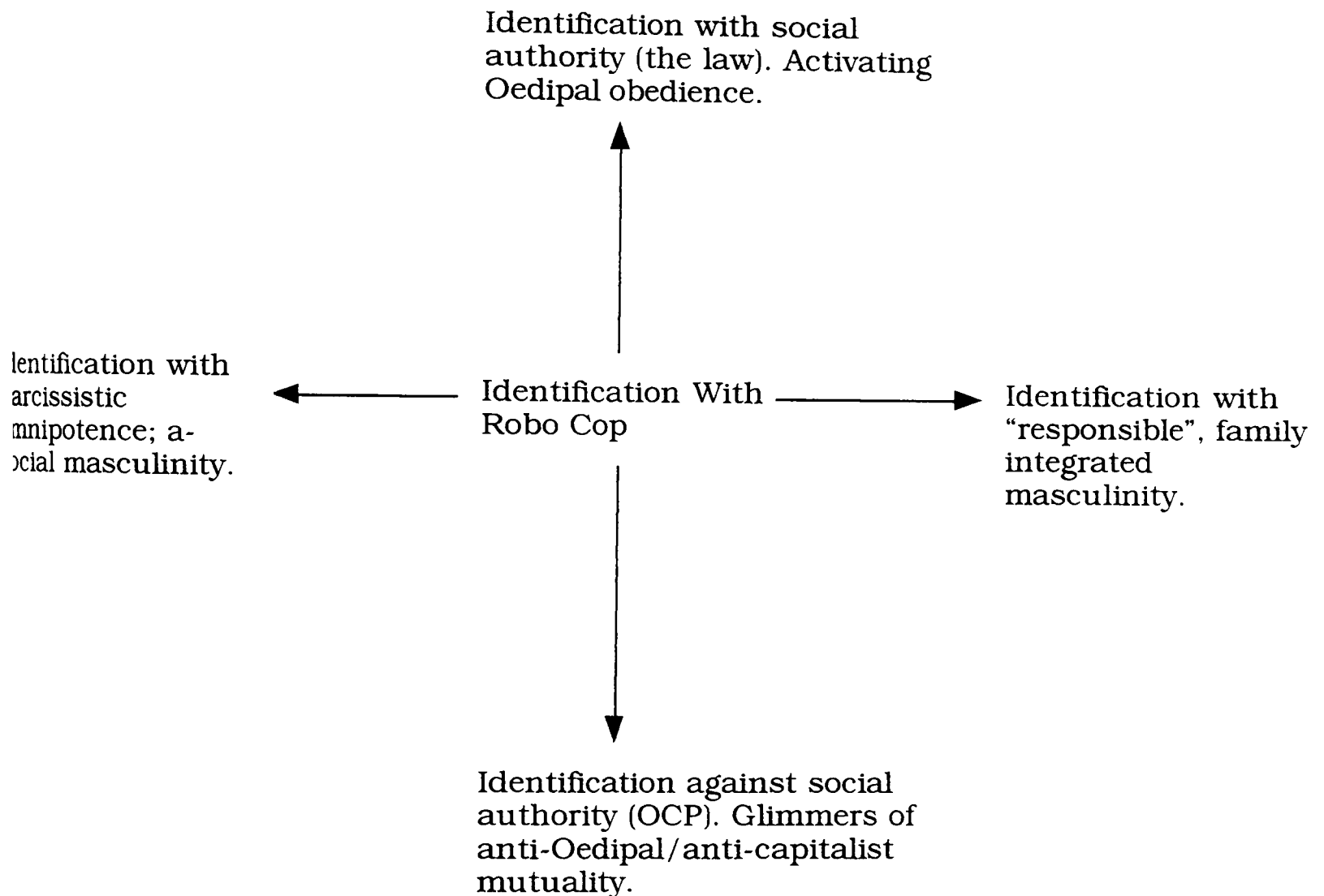


Figure Two: Psychical dynamics of spectator identification

## **Part Two: Narratives**

# **Genealogical Travels**



"...the market which is not bound by ethical norms, with its exploitation of constellations of interests and monopoly positions...is an abomination to every system of fraternal ethics." - M. Weber. <sup>1</sup>

"Let your eyes look deeply into the fixed stare / Of Satyresses or of Nymphs"  
Baudelaire. <sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Local Hero (B. Forsyth 1983) and Funny Bones (P. Chelsom, 1995) share certain textual features as a result of the production strategies they deploy for the low budget British film trying to achieve some limited American distribution in the context of Hollywood's continuing hegemony in the 1980s. Indeed at one level these films can be read as allegories about Hollywood and British cinema, about the former's cultural white roots in Europe and the latter's domination by the former. Through the premise of characters travelling between America and Britain, both films make use of limited American location shooting (Texas and Las Vegas respectively); both films make use of a once major American star (Burt Lancaster and Jerry Lewis), thus underscoring the nostalgic mode of both films; and both films give that star similar narrative functions. They are the premise to both narratives, functioning as Father figures who dispatch their "son" (or employee in Local Hero) on some mission (unintentionally in the case of Funny Bones). At the conclusion of the films Lancaster and Lewis each arrive in Britain to act as *deus ex machinas* (Lancaster's character, literally descending out of the sky like a God from a machine, but in this case here a helicopter). As this suggests, in order to keep budget costs down, both Lancaster and Lewis have limited roles for the greater part of the middle portion of the films. Instead the major role for the travelling American character is delegated to relatively unknown (i.e. cheaper) actors (Peter Reigert in Local Hero, Oliver Platt in Funny Bones). Through these travelling American characters, both films are about a return to Britain which is in some sense a discovery of lost values - a perennial theme in discourses on modernity. Specifically both films are about a return to a lost authenticity not governed by the same intensive business practices that characterise the traveller's home. The main focus of my discussion will be

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<sup>1</sup> M. Weber, Economy and Society vol.1 (eds) G. Roth and C. Wittich, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978, p.637.

<sup>2</sup> W. Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" in Illuminations Pimlico Press, 1999, p.186.

Local Hero. Released in 1983, the same year that Margaret Thatcher was re-elected, it has a number of themes which connect back to the previous chapter, making it an excellent point of transition from discussing the British consumption of Hollywood films, to British films themselves. However, comparative analysis with Funny Bones will also be instructive. Despite their differences, there are significant convergences between the two films, made over a decade apart from each other, to suggest that the tensions they deal with and the strategies they deploy, are deeply embedded in the national cultural formation and international cultural exchanges.

### **Ideology and Utopia**

It is undoubtedly true, as Colin McArthur notes, that in terms of representations of Scottishness, Local Hero is a profoundly unsatisfactory film.<sup>3</sup> That being understood, the film is of considerable interest for other reasons. It is extraordinarily sensitive to its historical context and keys into and anticipates some major themes of the 1980s and beyond; more importantly, its ideological capers are sufficiently complex to warrant further attention; still more crucially, I am interested in its utopian and transcendent impulses: in short, while the film's engagement with a particular particularity (i.e. Scottishness) is lamentable, its engagement with a universal problem (i.e. capitalism) gives it an enduring relevance. Fredric Jameson has this to say about the utopian, transcendent impulse in mass culture:

“...the drawing power of the works of mass culture...[implies] that such works cannot manage anxieties about the social order unless they have first revived them and given them some rudimentary expression; ...anxiety and hope are two faces of the same collective consciousness, so that the works of mass culture, even if their function lies in the legitimation of the existing order - or some worse one - cannot do their job without deflecting in the latter's service the deepest and most fundamental hopes and fantasies of the collectivity, to which they can therefore, no matter in how distorted

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<sup>3</sup> C. McArthur, “The Cultural Necessity Of A Poor Celtic Cinema” in Border Crossing, Film In Ireland, Britain And Europe, (ed) J. Hill, M. Mcloone and P. Hainsworth, Institute of Irish Studies/BFI, 1994, p.119.

a fashion, be found to have given voice.”<sup>4</sup>

Both Local Hero and Funny Bones connect this utopian dimension to genealogical travels. Such narrative travels evoke ancestral returns, ur-pasts in which characters discover how things became as they are and there is even a sense in both films that the present has to settle accounts with the past. Such themes connect these genealogical travels to the core theoretical model of this project which has been inspired by Benjamin's interest in the ceaseless revival of the distant past within modernity. He recognised that such revivals could be critical and/or affirmative with regards to the present. It's affirmative potential resides in the way it constructs a continuum between past and present which marks an evolutionary progress and naturalises the present by reconnecting it with its more 'natural' past, channelling the energy, vitality and presumed authenticity of the past into the service of the present. It's critical impulse resides in the fact that the projection back into the past testifies to a utopian wish to break with that which is outdated in the present and discharge the as yet unrealised promises of modernity.

### **Textual Antinomies**

There is a scene in Local Hero which crystallises the fundamental opposition which animates the film and the internal tensions within each term of that opposition. Mackintyre, the man Knox oil has sent from Texas to Scotland to negotiate the sale of the village of Ferness, is trudging across a beachy bay with Oldsen, also a Knox man, but from Aberdeen. They are discussing all the commodities which are dependent on oil. "Can you imagine a world without oil?" asks Mac. The list includes: cars, paint, polish, ink, nylon, detergents, perspex, polythene, dry cleaning fluids and water proof coats. The dialogue is a testament to the way capitalist modernity has expanded the forces of production, by the transformation of nature into useful commodities. There is however a tension between sound and image. For the scene is constructed in long shot, diminishing the human characters against the backdrop of the setting sun. As we shall see, this connects with a chain of signifiers in the film which seek to relativise human kind through the grandeur of nature or the proximity of myth. The

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<sup>4</sup> F. Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" in Signatures Of The Visible Routledge, London, 1992, p.30.

film attempts to do this as a strategy to redress the loss of authenticity brought about by capitalist modernity's transformation of social and natural relations. However, the film is also ambivalent about its counter strategy. For when it comes to diminishing the power of humanity over the environment, the film acknowledges the implications that has for diminishing human desires and ambitions, a scenario the film is not entirely reconciled to. The tensions and antinomies can be mapped in the following diagram.

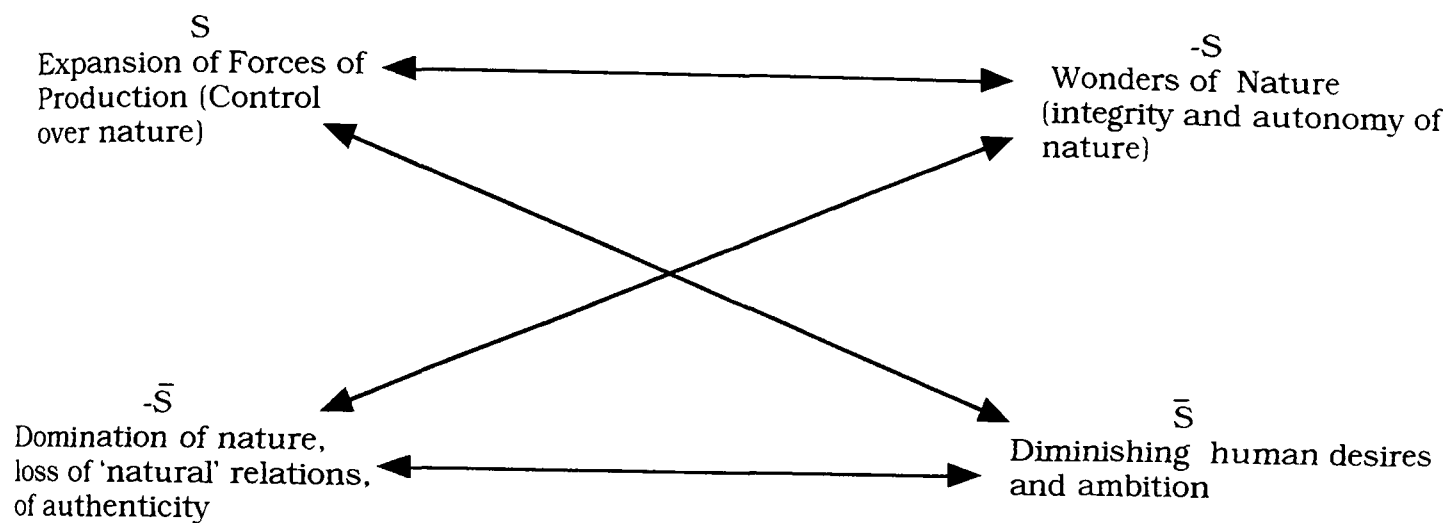


Fig One: Local Hero

This diagram draws on A.J. Griemas' semiotic rectangle which Fredric Jameson has argued can be appropriated for use in Marxist cultural theory once it is understood as a "model of ideological closure." That is to say, the antinomies mapped out within the rectangle identify "the limits of a specific ideological consciousness and marks the conceptual points beyond which that consciousness cannot go, and between which it is condemned to oscillate." <sup>5</sup> The rectangle maps out the structure of oppositions which generate meanings in the text in the following manner. The principle binary opposition is between S (control over nature) versus -S (the integrity of nature). But each pole of this major antinomy is subverted by the consequences they each lead to. Thus -S is in opposition to S but only at the expense of  $\bar{S}$  (diminishing human desire) thus transforming itself, in extremis, into the abolition of humanity (figured as the apocalyptic visions in the film) which is the negative opposite of humanity's domination of nature and the authentic self (  $\bar{S}$  ) which S leads to. <sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> F. Jameson, The Political Unconscious, Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act Routledge, London, 1989, p.47.

<sup>6</sup> F. Jameson, *ibid*, p.166-167.

As Jameson notes, the semiotic rectangle marks the cultural text's transformation of a social contradiction into "a stark antinomy, an insoluble logical paradox" which nevertheless provides the possibility for some sort of fantasy "solution", one which must necessarily fall far short of a transformation in the social relations of production. Ideally, the solution would require disjoining the same of human control from its debilitating associations with exploitation (-S) and combining it with the same which valorises nature without the negative effects that has for human desire and ambition.<sup>7</sup> America and Scotland represent important ideological terrains in this semiotic game. The film excavates the latter from the historical past in its search for more authentic social relations. The process of disjoining and recombination is effected by two causal agents in anthropomorphic form: Mr Happer from Texas, the owner of the multinational company Knox oil and Ben Knox, from Scotland, the owner of a crumbling shack and a four mile stretch of beach. As we shall see however, while the film stages a solution at the level of plot, a solution which is of course ideological, there is a less secure closure in the *mise en scene* where there remains, quite self consciously, a residue of dissatisfaction around the question of human desire. As we saw, both in relation to Henry and Katherine in The Private Life of Henry VIII, desire will be sacrificed to shore up the social order. While, as we shall see, Local Hero is a response to its immediate political and economic conjuncture, we also have to rotate the text onto the axis of cultural history. In doing so we see Local Hero's particular configuration of social contradictions into a set of antinomies, as part of a longer term problematic. Thus we need to reconstruct a debate that has taken place in relation to our two main ideologemes: modernity and its apparent antagonist, the organic community.

### **The Organic Community and Modernity**

In order to explore the sociological and philosophical relations between the organic community and modernity, I want to turn to the work of Max Weber and the critique associated with the Frankfurt School. The fundamental point I want to make is that as abstract doctrines and protonarratives, the organic community and modernity construct each other as opposites, concealing, as binaries often do, their structural, although unequal interdependence. It is this which transforms a social contradiction into that

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<sup>7</sup> F. Jameson, *ibid*, p.167.

stark antinomy which can be endlessly replayed, in different forms and registers, without radical change. I will want to map the modernity/tradition couplet onto Max Weber's distinction between formal and substantive rationality.

The key concept in Weber's analysis of the consequences of capitalist modernity, is rationalisation. Capitalist economic transactions require and generate a "purely instrumental orientation of economic action to opportunities for exchange and to these alone."<sup>8</sup> In terms that sound remarkably similar to the Marxist concept of base and superstructure, Weber argues that:

"The modern capitalist enterprise rests primarily on *calculation* and presupposes a legal and administrative system whose functioning can be rationally calculated, at least in principle, on the basis of fixed norms, just like the expected performance of a machine."<sup>9</sup>

Weber's concept explains why historically, the rise of capitalism required a cultural revolution<sup>10</sup> that swept away the values and beliefs of a pre-modern social order. In a pre-modern society, a particular case or grievance might be resolved by revelation, oracle, ordeal or simply adherence to sacred tradition, all of which would be too unpredictable and constraining for capitalism. Instead modern institutions must be governed by bureaucratic administration that is impersonal and functional, meshing with the instrumentality and impersonality of market transactions. This leads Weber to the gloomy conclusion that contemporary humanity is trapped in the "iron cage" of bureaucracy. It also leads Weber to the surprising conclusion that contemporary life has lost much of its *meaning*.

In order to understand how, according to Weber, as the world has become more explicable in scientific terms, it has become less meaningful, we need recourse to his important distinction between formal and substantive rationality. Formal rationality refers to action that is governed by what is technically possible, quantitatively calculable and implemented according to

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<sup>8</sup> R. Brubaker, The Limits of Rationality: An Essay on the Social and Moral Thought of Max Weber Routledge, London, 1991, p.11.

<sup>9</sup> M. Weber, Economy and Society (eds) G. Roth and C. Wittich, vol. 2, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978, p. 1394.

<sup>10</sup> F. Jameson, The Political Unconscious op. cit., p.97.

the objective rules of the economy: self interest and efficiency. Substantive rationality on the other hand applies other criteria of ultimate ends such as of an ethical, political, hedonistic or egalitarian kind.<sup>11</sup> It is clear that the expansion of formal rationality must be at the expense of substantive rationality. It is also clear that formal rationality interlocks with capitalism rather more “naturally” than substantive rationality. One can see parallels here between Weber’s distinction and the Marxist analysis of the commodity as comprising exchange value and use value. Under capitalism, use value is subordinated to exchange value (the transformation of surplus value into profit). The interlocking of formal rationality with the expansion of exchange value confines reason to “the choice of means rather than ends.”<sup>12</sup> Reason can only find the best means to implement ends which are themselves not open to dispute since they are the given ones of capitalist accumulation.

Weber suggests that as rationalisation has become embedded in institutions and culture, it has led to a loss of meaning. With the spread of formal rationality through modern science, the world is drained of mystery, superstition and magic, all of which would be obstacles to the rational manipulation of the natural and social world. Weber calls this process, *disenchantment* and as we shall see, it is a crucial concept for Local Hero. Drawing the notion of disenchantment into a Marxist historical scheme, it is clear that disenchantment remains a progressive and liberating historical process. But while disenchantment enhances the power of the intellect and expands the forces of production, it has its dark side, for it divests the world of meaning. This is to say that rationalisation evacuates ethical and moral significance from activities. What is technically possible and economically viable becomes an end in itself.<sup>13</sup> Jameson diagnosed this process as the waning of affect in his attempts to construct a modern/postmodern chronology.<sup>14</sup> By following Benjamin’s method of constellating space and time, I am instead absorbing what has been diagnosed as postmodern into the long epoch of capitalist modernity.

Weber identifies one of the consequences of rationalisation thus:

<sup>11</sup> M. Weber, Economy and Society (eds) G. Roth and C. Wittich, vol. 1, op.cit., p.506.

<sup>12</sup> M. Jay, Adorno Fontana, London, 1984, p.72.

<sup>13</sup> R. Brubaker, The Limits of Rationality op.cit., p.80-81.

<sup>14</sup> F. Jameson, “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” in Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Verso, London, 1991, p.10.

“As intellectualism suppresses belief in magic, the world’s processes become disenchanted, lose their magical significance, and henceforth simply “are” and “happen” but no longer signify anything. As a consequence, there is a growing demand that the world and the total pattern of life be subject to an order that is significant and meaningful.”<sup>15</sup>

The conflict between the “requirement of meaningfulness” and the “empirical realities of the world and its institutions”<sup>16</sup> leads to retreats from modernity, returns to nature and even the irruption of “magic” or the irrational in a metaphysical attempt to staunch the haemorrhage of meaning from modern life. The assimilation and recuperation of these responses by consumer capitalism which attempts to *reenchant* what it itself has disenchanted, is one of the most central dynamics in the field of culture.

Those German intellectuals working within the ambit of the Frankfurt School also had a similar analysis of the fate of reason under capitalism and how this might lead to a growing demand for, as Weber puts it “an order that is significant and meaningful.” Thus they trace the links between monopoly capitalism, the rise of fascism and the cult of nature and the irrational. The Frankfurt School traced the dialectical transformation of (instrumental) reason into its opposite (the irrational). Humanity saw the conquering of nature as a sign, as Lowenthal puts it, of the “unlimited potential of reason and, specifically, his hope for political and social reconstruction.”<sup>17</sup> But as Horkheimer warns, where once reason “was supposed to order the relationships among men and to justify all performances demanded of them”<sup>18</sup> reason, now becomes the instrument not of emancipation, but enslavement. For having made nature Other in order to dominate it (the problematic of the Alien films), humanity simultaneously and increasingly in the twentieth century, extends the apparatus of control and domination that has been developed to conquer

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<sup>15</sup> M. Weber, Economy and Society (eds) G. Roth and C. Wittich, vol. 1, op.cit., p.506.

<sup>16</sup> M. Weber, *ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> L. Lowenthal, “Knut Hamsun” in The Essential Frankfurt School Reader (eds) A. Arato and E. Gebhardt, Urizen Books, New York, 1978, p.321.

<sup>18</sup> M. Horkheimer, “The End of Reason” in The Essential Frankfurt School Reader op.cit., p.26.



nature, to humanity itself, making humanity Other to itself. <sup>19</sup> As Horkheimer puts it:

“The proposition of idealistic philosophy that reason distinguishes man from the animal (propositions in which the animal is humiliated just as man is in the converse propositions of the materialist doctors) contain the truth that through reason man frees himself of the fetters of nature. This liberation, however, does not entitle man to dominate nature (as the philosophers held) but to comprehend it.” <sup>20</sup>

Horkheimer's reference to “materialist doctors” reminds one of Foucault's studies into the relationships between science and institutionalised power. Foucault was highly critical of the way knowledge and power were articulated in the western episteme, through the gaze. <sup>21</sup> Foucault took Bentham's panoptican design for prisons as an exemplary instance of this.<sup>22</sup> Local Hero is also ambivalent about what I will term, the naturalist gaze, precisely because of its complicity with capitalism's domination of nature. The latent Green politics of the Frankfurt School and the tension between dominating nature and comprehending it, is central to the dilemma of Local Hero as it struggles to reconcile private property with nature and knowledge with humility. The domination of nature and the self lays the seeds for a reaction in which nature is increasingly reconfigured “as a realm of freedom and a source of happiness and consolation.” <sup>23</sup>

Yet, for the Frankfurt School this was no escape from modernity. The attempt to reinvest the natural world with metaphysical values, the attempt, in Weber's terms, to re-enchant the world via a “mystical identification” with nature and “rapt surrender” to it, merely encouraged the surrender of critical faculties and the naturalisation of “every arbitrary power” and fascism in particular. <sup>24</sup> From a Benjaminian perspective, Weber's concept of rationalisation can be seen as an example of a linear

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<sup>19</sup> M. Jay, Adorno op.cit., p.62.

<sup>20</sup> M. Horkheimer, “The End of Reason” op.cit., p.47.

<sup>21</sup> M. Jay “In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought” in Foucault: A Critical Reader (ed) D.C. Hoy, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989.

<sup>22</sup> M. Foucault, Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison London, Allen Lane, 1977.

<sup>23</sup> L. Lowenthal, “Knut Hamsun” op.cit., p.320.

<sup>24</sup> L. Lowenthal, *ibid*, p.326.

and undialectical theory. As Susan Buck-Morss argues:

"...if social and cultural institutions had become rationalised in form, this process allowed content to be delivered up to very different forces. Underneath the surface of increasing systemic rationalisation, on an unconscious "dream" level, the new urban-industrial world had become fully reenchanting. In the modern city...myth was alive everywhere. It peered out of wall posters advertising "toothpaste for giants" and whispered its presence in the most rationalised urban plans that, "with their uniform streets and endless rows of buildings, have realized the dreamed-of architecture of the ancients: the labyrinth." " 25

The politically ambivalent quality of this new mythology is evident in the writings of the surrealist Louis Aragon who described the ancient/modern juxtapositions to be found in Paris:

"They are the great red gods, the great yellow gods, the great green gods...Hardly ever have human beings submitted themselves to so barbarous a view of destiny and force. Anonymous sculptors...have constructed these metallic phantoms...These idols bear a family resemblance, which renders them awesome. Decorated with English words...at times these gasoline dispensers have the allure of Egyptian gods, or those of cannibal tribes who worship nothing but war. O Texaco motor oil, Esso, Shell! Noble inscriptions of human potential!" 26

If historically, myths were stories generated by human kind to cope with its infancy, that is to say, its relative powerlessness vis-a-vis nature, then their persistence in the age of advanced capitalism requires a different explanation. Here the ancient imagery identifies both the godlike power which human productivity has acquired *over nature*, while simultaneously transforming that power into an alienated reality, a *new nature*, to which humanity must bow down to, no matter what the costs (including war).

Local Hero and Funny Bones both contemplate a Weberian rationalizing

25 S. Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing, op.cit., p.254.

26 Quoted in S. Buck-Morss, *ibid*, p.257.

logic which, under the impetus of globalisation, is sweeping all before it, while at the same time finding in a Scottish village and Blackpool respectively, some location for older, utopian meanings and values. Around these locations frozen at some earlier moment of capitalist development, both films dream the dream of the collective unconscious, but like the Freudian dream, they are dreams which inscribe on the very inside of their discourse, the force of a repression. For these dreams cannot become reality within the social relations of bourgeois production.<sup>27</sup> The organic communities which these films return to are therefore politically ambivalent, especially in Local Hero. In this film it has a critical component to it insofar as it is mobilised to offer an alternative to American capitalism and critique the aping of it by Thatcherism. At the same time, the organic community is profoundly complicit with the very relations it critiques. Adapting itself to commodity relations generally, it offers itself as a tiny geographical and psychical space within a universe otherwise dominated by commodity relations, its 'critical' reach desperately truncated by accommodation to the global system. This of course is the very dilemma which had confronted Leavis and his literary project, even if the chosen terms evaded the crucial social relations, displacing them instead onto notions such as 'industrialisation' and 'mass society'. Fifty years after Leavisite criticism sought to mobilise the organic community in its own peculiarly English version of what the Frankfurt School called 'negation', the organic community has shrunk from national imaginary to something of a last redoubt or rock pool as the tide of neo-liberal capitalism comes in.

### **Local Hero**

"Nature guards her treasures jealously. Just a decade ago these fields were beyond our reach, we didn't have the technology. Today a Knox engineer will tell you that he might need a little time, but he'll get the oil. He knows that a little time is all we have left."

Thus runs the voice over to a promotional video for Knox oil. The camera pans across arctic wastes and deserts before triumphantly revealing the pipes and refineries which testify to humanity's increasing control over the natural world. However, this valorisation of capitalism is immediately called

<sup>27</sup> S. Buck-Morss, *ibid*, pp.281-282.

into question by the ambiguity of the voice-over's final line concerning "a little time is all we have left." Its intimations of mortality set into play a chain of discourses concerning the insignificance of human activities and even the prospect of humanity itself being fundamentally transformed or erased by some near future apocalyptic event. The text's allegorical warning concerning the sustainability of capitalism in regard to both the human and natural world, is embodied in the comet which Happer is searching for but has yet to find.

Despite owning Knox oil, Happer's distancing from his own objective social position is signalled by his snoring figure as the promotional video comes to an end. The mogul who has lost interest in his own company is a common trope in Hollywood cinema (see Big (P. Marshall, 1988) for example). Timid oil executives discuss in hushed voices the "acquisition of Scotland." Less grandiosely, they are after a site for an on- shore oil terminal and the only one suitable is a bay occupied by the village of Ferness. Written by the director, Bill Forsyth, Local Hero taps into a decade long debate within Scotland concerning how little it has benefited from the American control over the oil fields. Perhaps the Ur-narrative here is 7:84's celebrated television adaption of their play, The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil (BBC 1974). This placed the exploitation of the oil fields in the historical context of two hundred years of capitalist expansion.

However, while Local Hero might be said to be looking back to the 1970s in this sense, it rearticulates the question of material benefits within a decidedly 1980s context of self interest and greed. Here the film plays on the political symbolism of Scotland as a bastion against Thatcherite values. Here is an example of how the particular (Scotland) comes to mediate more universal concerns (how far has capitalism penetrated every corner of our lives?) for the village can hardly wait to sell up and move on with their riches. The corruption of the community is signified by their meeting in the Church to discuss the deal with Knox oil. Around the village the talk is of nothing else but the luxury goods which people will buy (Rolls Royce or Maserati) with their American petrodollars. Here the film draws on and partially (but only partially) subverts the Kailyard tradition of representations of Scottishness. The Kailyard tradition refers to a set of discourses which invoke a 'primitive' nostalgic and above all parochialist

community.<sup>28</sup> This gives the film's organic community a distinctly Scottish inflection, one which is given a new twist as the canny Scottish folk cannot wait to negotiate a meal ticket out of their parochial lives. Of course, in their failure and in the film's (albeit ambiguous) celebration of that failure, the Kailyard tradition is upheld, as is the fact that Ferness, like the Kailyard community of old, is, as Cairns Craig notes, "a world at death's door precisely so that its values cannot impinge directly upon the contemporary world."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the film's ideological project may be described as trying to both celebrate these values while reconciling them with a contemporary world run according to quite different criteria. Craig's argument that the images inherited from the past must be released from "the frozen worlds" of myth is similar to Benjamin's warning that, "[i]n every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it..."<sup>30</sup>

Back in Texas, Knox oil prepare to dispatch Mackintyre to make a deal with the village. They presume that Mac has Scottish ancestors and hope that this genealogy might facilitate a deal. However, as Mac confesses to a colleague, his parents were from Hungary (suggesting Jewish ancestry) but (in a move which echoes the Jewish movie moguls who adopted WASP identities in Hollywood's early years) Mac's parents changed the family name because they thought Mackintyre was American. The story sums up a number of paradoxical relations between travel and identity. There is the desire to be assimilated, the assumption that there is a 'pure' American identity to be assimilated to and the irony of swapping one immigrant identity for another. All this hints at that scepticism concerning authentic essences unleashed by the economics of the New Right on the one hand and the new interest in the politics of identity from the Left, discussed in the previous chapter. Along with the Black reverend, Father Macpherson and the Russian sailor-capitalist, Victor (an anticipatory figure given the collapse of the Eastern bloc a few years later) there is something of a diasporic structure of feeling in Local Hero. And yet, this is mobilised not to create new identities but to generate humour by the discrepancy between what these characters do and say and where they find themselves (eg a

<sup>28</sup> C. Craig, "Myths Against History: Tartanry and Kailyard in C19th-century Scottish Literature." in Scotch Reels, Scotland in Cinema and Television (ed) C. McArthur, BFI, London, 1982.

<sup>29</sup> C. Craig, *ibid*, pp.11-12.

<sup>30</sup> W. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in Illuminations Pimlico Press, London, 1999. p.247.

Black reverend in the Scottish highlands complicit with the community's desire to sell up and leave, the inverted Kailyard tradition) and the presumed 'natural' selves which they have lost touch with.

Mac is summoned to the 'top floor' to meet Mr Happer before leaving for Scotland. Here at the summit of capitalism, the spectator finds the secretary putting Margaret Thatcher through to Happer. There is a partly celestial, partly science fiction quality to his environment, such as the steel stairs that Mac ascends to get to Happer's office. This semic ambiguity between futuristic and heavenly representations points to an ideological tension within the film and within the character of Happer. The celestial connotations suggest Happer to be disenchanted with the process of disenchantment described by Weber, while the generic hints towards science fiction allude to an imperious extension and universalisation of capital seen in the films discussed in chapter two. This ambivalence is reproduced via Happer and the comet. Does the search for the comet signify Happer's discontent with the hubris of humanity and a search for something other worldly which would put humanity's achievements into perspective? Happer's therapy sessions with Moritz would appear to be a comic attempt to introduce humility into the life of this all powerful figure. Moritz declares triumphantly at one point that he has got Happer's "ego on the run" as he tries to introduce some self doubt into his life. On the other hand, perhaps Happer's search for the comet (Moritz wonders if he would call it 'Happer's comet') is just another vainglorious project, the personal equivalent to corporate public relations? Another way of phrasing this is that the film wants to introduce some position from which capitalism could be relativised and some value other than exchange allowed to operate. The difficulty is finding a perspective (eg science) or position (eg the organic community) that is not already complicit with or helpless before capitalism's reach and power.

This dilemma is reproduced in reading Mac's travel to Scotland. As its emissary, Mac's journey appears to be part of the ceaseless expansion of capital around the globe. But on the other hand it seems to hold out the prospect of an escape from the world of corporate capitalism. Unlike Happer, Mac is, initially, too alienated to realise that he is alienated. For example he is bemused by Happer's instruction that he keep an eye out for unusual

activity in the night sky when in Scotland. Back in his flat, his isolation is underlined by his inability to get a date before he leaves Texas. When in Ferness, Oldsen wonders aloud if the Urquharts (Gordon and Stella) who own the local B&B, “do it every night”, he thinks not, precisely because it is not imaginable. Once in Ferness, his repressions become more evident, manifesting themselves in his fussiness with his suits, his stiff manner of walking, the bleeper on his watch reminding him to phone Houston and his overdependence on the gimmickry comforts of modernity such as his electric suitcase (that has run out of power and so will not open).

This contrasts with Gordon Urquhart, who enjoys not only minimal divisions of labour (he is the town accountant, lawyer and pub landlord) but, in his relations with Stella, something approximating to that “libidinal rationality” which Marcuse held out as a utopian reconciliation between affect and reason, desire and social convention.<sup>31</sup> I have argued that while Marcuse projected this concept into a radically transformed future, the organic community recovers it in the past. Yet this requires history and desire to be frozen in time to preserve the utopia from modernity. I suggested that the seeds of modernity lie in discontent, in unsatisfied longings which come into conflict with the organic community’s social fetters and call it into question *from within*. In Culture and Environment desire is figured as harmoniously integrated with the social order, but within the ideologeme generally (and in The Private life of Henry VIII specifically) there is always the potential for desire to become unstitched from the existing social fabric. This, as we shall see, is what haunts the organic community in Local Hero.

In the true fashion of allegory, the film recycles existing cultural materials into a unique configuration which is the text we have before us. In the case of the binary of repressed outsiders and spontaneous, ‘natural’ insiders, the intertextual reference is to the Ealing film Whisky Galore! (A. Mackendrick, 1948). In that film of course repression is signified by the stiff upper lip of the English, against which the Hebridean islanders can be aligned closely with nature. The opening sequence of Whisky Galore! gives a distinctly sexual connotation to this alignment by suggesting that with little else to do, large families were common on the islands. The intertextual reference

<sup>31</sup> H. Marcuse, Eros and Civilization: A philosophical inquiry into Freud Ark Paperbacks, London, 1987, p.199.

(picked up by reviewers) <sup>32</sup> is significant as is the difference between the two texts. The difference marks how the key dynamics in national identity are no longer solely between component parts of the United Kingdom, but also between the local and the global.

The question of desire is inscribed into the heart of these new dynamics. The untrammelled sexual desires of the villagers are not defined against the crippling social formality of the English but against the sublimation of sexual energy into the crowded commodified world of advanced capitalism. Thus desire is a signifier of authenticity. Yet it also threatens to undermine that very authenticity as the village rushes to join the commodified world of advanced capitalism. The paradox is that in getting back to nature, the text finds desires which threaten to disrupt the organic social order which is offered as more natural than global capitalism in the first place. The antinomy around which the text oscillates is that on the one hand capitalism appears to be outside natural desires, corrupting them, but on the other hand, it appears to be already inscribed within desire which seeks its commoditised world to find multiple expression. We are back again to the film's dilemma concerning the reach and power of capitalism: how totalizing is it? Has it, as the science fiction films discussed in chapter two wonder, colonised our internal and external world completely?

### **The Naturalistic and Enchanted Gaze**

This dialectic between the expansion or containment of capital, the expansion or containment of desire and how capital and desire appear antithetical but also worryingly complicit, is also played out in the dynamics of the gaze. Following Mulvey, we can identify three (potentially) interlocking looks: that of the omniscient camera, that of the intra diegetic looks between characters, and the look of the spectator watching the film.

<sup>33</sup> Mulvey of course was interested in exploring the male gaze from a psychoanalytic perspective. However, if we think of the gaze as the inscription of discourses into the looks and visual exchanges identified above, then it is clear that we can identify other kinds of 'gazes' and articulate them in a more socio-historical direction. There are two that are relevant to my discussion. One gaze is associated with science and

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<sup>32</sup> see T. Milne (ed), *The Time Out Film Guide* Penguin Books, London, 1993, p.409.

<sup>33</sup> L. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Screen* vol.16, no.3, 1975.



knowledge, examining the natural world as explicable phenomena. This is the naturalistic gaze. The other gaze is naive, innocent of the explanations of science and prone to wonder. This I will call the enchanted gaze.

The naturalist gaze is well evident in the already discussed promotional video which celebrates how through technological advances, nature has been forced to submit to human desire. The text however is suspicious of this gaze, knowing its complicity with the domination of nature. When Mac arrives in Scotland, he is taken to the Knox laboratory where scientists show him a model of the bay and the proposed terminal. However, even here, there is a shift towards the end of the scene to another discourse, where the scientists discuss the coming of the second ice age. This invokes that intimation of natural apocalypse that the comet itself might signal, and although the scientists proudly declare that the terminal could withstand such an event, the proposed ice age radically relativises their achievement. The text senses the hubris that knowledge produces and how knowledge, put into the service of capital's desire to shape everything according to its agenda, is thereby compromised. The text senses too that this is a loss not just for the external environment, but for the internal life of the human subject as well.

Countering this gaze then is that which invokes awe and is associated with the magical and the mystical representation of nature. On the one hand this enchanted gaze appears to relativise the dreary world of business and offer the prospect of awakening, especially in Mac, a new kind of relationship to the natural world, one that eschews exploitation and one that is rooted in 'authentic' desires. On the other hand, the text cannot entirely align itself with this gaze, for to do so would sabotage the pragmatic/'realist' terms of the text's reconciliation with global capitalism. Nevertheless, insofar as the text does invoke this gaze, we can connect Local Hero back to the romantic mysticisms of Powell and Pressburger, although the film has no roots in the Squirearchy that animated Powell's political and class imaginary.<sup>34</sup> Again, as with the difference between Local Hero and Whisky Galore! this difference tells us something about the changing meaning of the organic community in the context of globalisation. For the enchanted gaze is rooted here not in a specific strata of the agrarian wing

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<sup>34</sup> R. Durnat, A Mirror For England, British Movies From Austerity To Affluence Faber and faber, London, 1970, pp.28-29 and pp.207-215.

of the dominant class, but in that generalised search for the exotic and the different which is the province of tourism. Thus the very aesthetic forms associated with Britishness, their rootedness in national class dynamics, have, four decades later, become disembedded.

The construction of Ferness as an enchanted place is first hinted at as Mac and Oldsen drive towards the village (shades here of Brigadoon).<sup>35</sup> Oldsen stops the car fearing he has hit something and they discover a wounded rabbit. Having deposited the rabbit in the car, the journey is brought to an abrupt halt by a thick fog rolling in across the highlands, enclosing this emissary of capitalism in its strange power, Mac in fact adopts the rabbit and keeps it in his room, betraying a trace of sentimentality about nature which is otherwise there to be reshaped according to the corporate agenda of Knox oil. Charles Barr has noted of Whisky Galore! that it has a certain hard nosed quality to its comedy which is poles apart from the English whimsy or sentimentality which Ealing's films sometimes skirted close to and eventually collapsed into,<sup>36</sup> A similar structure of feeling is evident to some extent in Local Hero with its tale of a community ready and willing to sell up. This materialism also dovetails with the naturalistic gaze. As Victor, the visiting Russian captain tells Mac later, "you can't eat scenery." You can however eat rabbits as Mac finds out when he realises that the delicious meal Gordon Urquhart has cooked for him was his adopted pet. The comedy here comes from the contrast between Mac's sentimental attitude and Urquhart's bluff, pragmatic naturalism: the rabbit had a broken leg, it was in pain, he put it out of its misery and why waste good food?

In the scene just discussed, the text tilts slightly towards Urquhart's naturalism. However, a little later it tilts towards Mac as his sentimentality shifts into another gear altogether, that of the enchanted. This happens, significantly, just after Mac is introduced to Ben Knox by Urquhart. Looking up into the night sky Mac is astonished by a meteor shower. The spectacle is overly familiar to Urquhart and he is unimpressed. This time however, the text aligns itself with the awed looks of Mac and Oldsen as they begin to appreciate the strange and mysterious quality of nature which the soundtrack is invoking through a mixture of horns and synthesisers.

<sup>35</sup> C. McArthur, "Scotland and Cinema: The Iniquity of the Fathers" in Scotch Reels op.cit., p.47.

<sup>36</sup> C. Barr, Ealing Studios Studio Vista, London, 1993. pp.110-118.

The impact of this spectacle on Mac is dramatic. In subsequent scenes, his dress codes change as he loses his tie and top button; he becomes much more enthusiastic about Happer's comet; he loses interest in the details of the business deal and he begins collecting shells. This last activity causes him to leave his watch by a rock pool where it is later reclaimed by the sea even as it emits the last beeps which synchronised Mac to the business world of Houston. Mac's narrative trajectory appears to be moving in the opposite direction to everyone and everything else. Urquhart, who acts as Victor's investment broker, tells his Russian friend that, "We've been invaded by America...we won't have anywhere to call home but we'll be stinking rich."

In some ways the film can be read as a very British version of Hollywood's big business films of the 1980s. Judith Williamson notes how these films tried to reconcile the pursuit of wealth with social virtue by using a life swap narrative strategy. This functioned to catapult an outsider into the business environment, transferring the outsider's 'good' values to the system and thus transforming an exploitative regime into a wholesome one.<sup>37</sup> In Local Hero we have a figure from inside the system who is moving away from it and we have a whole community of 'outsiders' who are hoping to become 'insiders' of a sort. However, this text is too worried about the loss on both sides and so the life swap is stalled and the reconciliation between capitalism and the organic community is achieved by other means.

Before exploring how this reconciliation is achieved it is worth just pausing to reflect on the character of Marina. For this character appears to bring the naturalistic and enchanted gaze together in a single figure. Yet it is not through her that the reconciliation is effected for she remains a marginal figure throughout the film. On the one hand Marina is a scientist, working for Knox oil, but under the impression that Knox are planning to build a marine conservatory for public relations purposes. Thus her naturalistic gaze is well to the fore when on the night of the village ceilidh, Oldsen is transfixed by the lights in the night sky. It is, Marina explains, the aurora borealis and she offers a rational analysis incompatible with the beauty of the moment. On the other hand, Marina herself is the object of the

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<sup>37</sup> J. Williamson, " 'Up where you belong' : Hollywood images of big business in the 1980s" in Enterprise and Heritage Crosscurrents of National Culture (eds) J. Corner and S. Harvey, Routledge, London, 1991, pp. 151 -161.

enchanted gaze as it becomes apparent (as Oldsen kisses her webbed feet) that she is, at the very least, descended from mermaids and possibly is one. Marina is an image of the reconciliation of opposites which the text itself must achieve. At the same time the severity of the antithesis between scientist and mermaid is too much for the text's commitment to realism to contemplate. It could be said to represent the text's 'bad conscience' concerning the plausibility of the fantasy solution it does finally opt for.

In Mr Happer and Ben Knox, the text has two (male) characters which each reconcile 'softer' versions of the antithesis between the naturalistic and enchanted gaze, between capitalism and nature. Against the professionalised scientific discourse of Marina (too remote from the organic community, too complicit with capitalist rationalisation) Happer embodies a hobbyist's interest in the natural world while Knox's naturalism is embodied in common sense and an artisanal relationship with nature. Against Marina's direct genealogy with myth, Happer and Knox are drawn to the enchanted world but they are not *of* it, remaining connected to the historical world. Knox's private property, the beach, has been in the family four hundred years while the future, at least on the global scale, clearly belongs to likes of Knox oil.

All that is required is for the text to bring Happer and Knox together at the appropriate moment to achieve its fantasy reconciliation. This relates to a trope identified by Leslie Fieldler in The Return of The Vanishing American<sup>38</sup> whereby the native functions as a donor (in the structuralist sense), providing the white 'western' figure with knowledge and self understanding drawn from their closer proximity to nature. Happer, encouraged by Mac's reports of night sky activity, flies in to find Knox blocking the negotiations by refusing to sell up. While Mac and the community anxiously wait, Happer disappears into Knox's ramshackle abode, only to emerge to announce that the bay is the wrong location for the refinery and that he wants instead to build an observatory, an institute for the study of the sky and (at Oldsen's suggestion) the sea, to be called, (again at Oldsen's suggestion) the Happer Institute. If the disinterested mogul is a common trope within Hollywood films, Happer's transformation from rapacious capitalist to philanthropic, Renaissance man, can also be read as that mythical passage which Martin Weiner has described, whereby British

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<sup>38</sup> L. Fieldler, The Return Of The Vanishing American, Johnathan Cape, London, 1968

entrepreneurs retreat to their country houses, feigning an aristocratic disinterest in anything as vulgar as capitalist business.<sup>39</sup> But just how exceptional or particular is British capitalism in this regard? As Wallerstein has argued, there is a tension universal to capitalisms everywhere, between reinvesting the surplus value extracted for further accumulation and/or dispensing the fruits of that surplus value for purposes other than accumulation, such as conspicuous consumption or patronage. In the case of the latter,

“The demon of the ‘feudal-aristocratic’ idler, locked up in the bourgeois soul, emerges from the shadows, and the bourgeois seek to *nouveau noblement*.”<sup>40</sup>

There are of course material determinants impacting on the decline of British capitalism, as I discussed in chapter two (its sheer longevity making it susceptible to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, the Imperial heritage, the internationalisation of British capital, etc), but in cultural terms, Britishness offers a rich cultural past which may exacerbate this tension between reinvestment and non-profitmaking spending. In Local Hero, this past, capitalism’s primal scene, provides an image of the pleasure principle denied by the contemporary reality principle of accumulation for the sake of accumulation.

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<sup>39</sup> M. Weiner, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981.

<sup>40</sup> I. Wallerstein, “Marx and History” in E. Balibar and I. Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class, Ambiguous Identities trans. C. Turner, London, Verso, London, 1991, p.132.

We are now in a position to map the earlier diagram drawn from Jameson's appropriation of Griemas, onto my own modernity/tradition couplet. Figure two shows Mac is located on the axis representing modernity's division of labour but moving, narratively clockwise towards the unity of the organic community. The village by contrast are located on the mirror image of M.2, O.C.2 which indicates the stifling social fetters of the community. Their narrative trajectory is also clockwise towards the prospect of expanding one's horizons and potential which modernity offers. The imaginary solution to this contradiction is provided by John Knox and Happer, who represent, respectively, the unity of the organic community and the potentiality of modernity. The settlement between the two social orders is clearly a fantasy solution since they are logically antithetical.

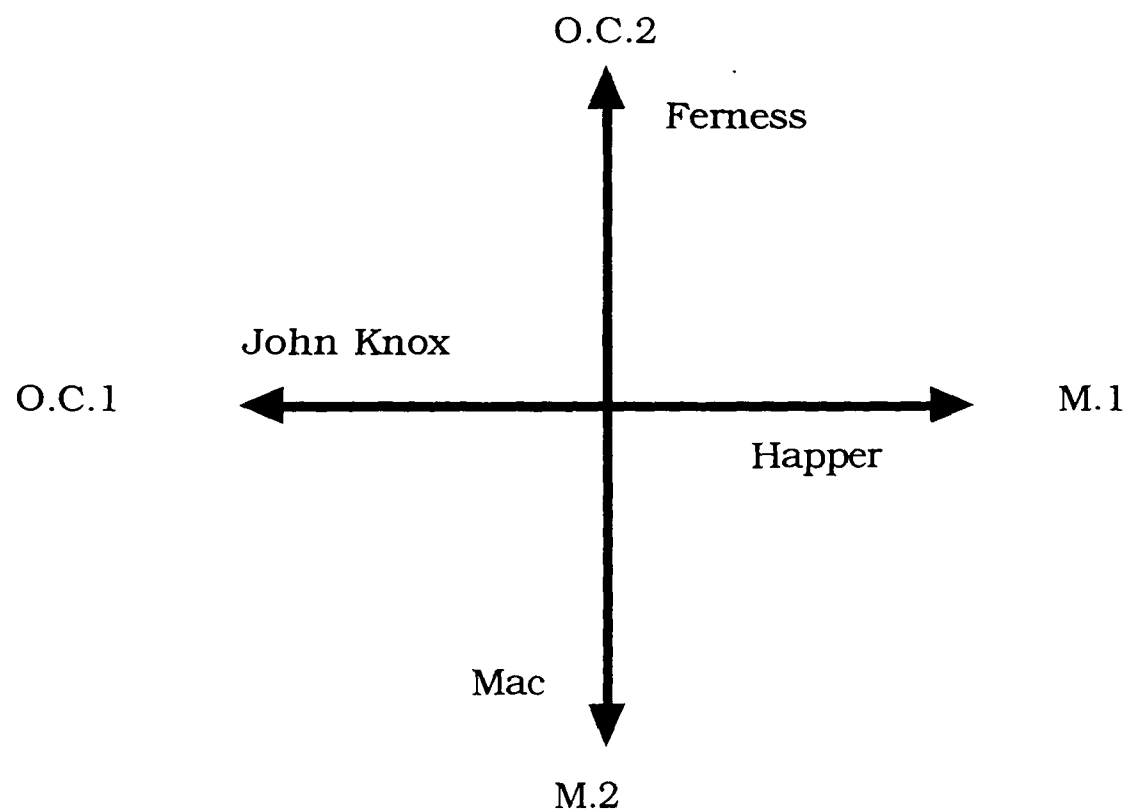


Fig.Two

The villagers are rescued from their greed by Knox the native local hero and Happer, now the 'feudal-aristocratic' idler. But the question of their desires and of Mac's, remains unsatisfactorily answered. Thus when Mac tries to console Urquhart that "at least the new plans will bring work and money" , Urquhart repeats the refrain "work and money" with evident weariness. Mac himself is dispatched almost immediately, like the wage slave he is, back to Houston. As his helicopter leaves the village, there is a final shot of Stella, Urquhart's wife, hanging out the washing and watching his departure. As he leaves, so does her hope of a different life. There is just a hint of a trope being mobilised here whereby the organic community represents an oppressively limiting and constraining social unit for women. Often, romance represents an escape route and here too there is proto suggestion of an unexplored attraction between Mac and Stella. The film has thus far been too concerned with its rebuke to Thatcherism to allow the desires of Urquhart, Stella and the village as a whole, to be framed in any other way than signifying a suspicious materialism. Finally, here in these last scenes we glimpse the utopian dimension to their desires, to transcend work and the limitations of their present existence. Such utopian desires cannot be accommodated by either Thatcherism or global capitalism, except, (as the film itself has suggested) in the alienated forms lived by Mac.

Back in his flat in Houston, Mac stares out across the lonely city from his balcony. The film then cuts to the village in the early morning and the phonebox which has been Mac's communication link with Houston, starts ringing. The *mise en scene* then suggests a surplus of desire and yearning (for the very community Urquhart and Stella were willing to give up) which the film's ideological resolution has not accommodated. The conflicting desires of Mac on the one hand and the villagers on the other, have been separated from the preservation of the social order: global capitalism on the one hand and the organic community on the other. This separation of individual desire from the reproduction of the social order, is the very indice of the organic community's ambivalent relationship of resistance to and complicity with capitalist modernity.

## Funny Bones

As we have seen, the problematic of the organic community is characterised by an attempt to reconnect with those cultural and social relations which are not easily accommodated within the onward march of modernity. As with Local Hero, so too with Funny Bones, there is an attempt to reconnect the modern with the (relatively) archaic. Specifically, the film provides what is a rare cinematic space for that now almost archaic form of physical comedy rooted in music hall traditions and in the circus. These are the forms of live entertainment which the mass media and entertainment industries have to a very large extent supplanted, but not before appropriating and remolding some of their talent and forms. In its *mise en scene*, particularly around the figure of Jack, the film hints at the unpredictable co-existence of comedy and danger, laughter and violence. Against the carefully prepackaged, predictable forms of the mass media and conglomerate entertainment industries, the libidinal, pre-linguistic comedy of the body which Jack (Lee Evans) gives expression to, can be read, in the film at least, as a kind of last redoubt (like the Scottish location in Local Hero) against a fully commoditised, rationalised world. Thus Jack refigures that integration of labour and culture which, as we saw in the discussion of Leavis and Thompson's work, is a key component of the organic community. Funny Bones superimposes across this story of cultural forms and relations, another allegorical tale of relations between the commercially driven modernity of America and the historical backwater of Britain, this time in the shape of Blackpool.

The main American protagonist, Tommy Fawkes, is dispatched to Britain by his powerful father, George. Where as in Local Hero, Mac's journey is the intentional result of corporate deal making, Tommy's quest is unplanned. Indeed we are introduced to him on the night of what should be his triumph in Las Vegas. Amid the big 'show biz' iconography of musical numbers, neon lights, stars, chauffeurs and adoring crowds, George Fawkes arrives at the venue his son is to perform at. Introduced by the compere as "Mr Originality himself", George briefly takes the stage and his relaxed, congenial working of the audience is to contrast strongly with Tommy's performance. Backstage Tommy is both convinced that he is going to "die" on stage but also determined to take risks, "pirouettes" as he describes it to



his scriptwriter. In the construction of authenticity which the film will play out, it is of course significant that Tommy's jokes are not his own (in apparent contrast to Mr Originality) but the product of a commercial transaction. His writer, sensitive to the context of the performance, urges him not to scandalise the mainstream audience, suggesting that rather than take further risks with them he use the "saver" if a joke does not come off. However, in an anticipation of what we are to learn about George, Fawkes senior uses ('steals') the same "saver" himself when warming up the audience. "A joke is like a women getting out of a car. Sometimes you see it, sometimes you don't." The audience respond and the comedian is back on track. This leaves Tommy little choice once he is on stage but to push his sour and abrasive personality further to the fore when the jokes do not score, resulting, as he prophesised, in his stage death. Yet the film will valorise precisely the links between comedy and its apparent antithesis which have been severed in the interests of commercial safety in America and the prohibition which the law (rather than commerce) places on Jack's performance in Britain.

Fleeing Las Vegas, Tommy arrives in Blackpool, the place where, we learn, he spent the first six years of his life. Like Mac in Ferness, Tommy cuts an incongruous figure in his new environment. Sitting in a Blackpool lawyer's office, framed by a wide angle lens, his bright yellow suit and blue shirt connote a flashiness in contrast to the piles of books and papers sprawled around him. The lawyer's amateurishness, which in British culture is a code for a certain distancing from commerce, is confirmed when he expresses amazement that Tommy is prepared to pay "actual cash" to see comedy material "here in Blackpool?" The affectionate sympathy which the film has towards the values embodied in the lawyer, is deeply rooted in British film culture and testifies to the very values which Thatcherism sought to deracinate. Like Knox Oil/Mac, Tommy has arrived in Britain to buy something; original ideas in this case. Tired of the stand up comic format, he instructs the lawyer to find examples of physical comedy, material which he can expropriate, take back with him to America and use for his own purposes. Tommy's sense that he has come back to the origins or source of comedy is underlined by his flashbacks to his Blackpool childhood. Represented in home cine film mode, this appears to have been a time of happiness and closeness with his father, with whom he is seen playing on

the beach.

If amateurishness is one code for a certain arms length relationship to capitalism, the figure of the grotesque and the eccentric are even more indicative of an archaic oddity profoundly marginalised and peripheral to the centres of the entertainment industry and its standardised forms. Typical here is Jack's father, Bruno Parker and his uncle Thomas, who live in a quaking hut underneath the roller coaster and work part time as real life figures for the ghost train ride. (They are of course, the most frightening attraction on the ride). Their introduction into the film, when they are visited by two policemen, underlines their peculiarity with skewed camera angles, slow motion, disorientating editing and unnerving shifts from non-diegetic to diegetic sound. Here we are a million miles away from the scale and wealth of George Fawkes' world.

Bruno, Thomas and Jack are not out of place here. Blackpool is the spiritual home to the detritus of music hall traditions. When reviewing the various acts his lawyer has organised, a "Rabelaisian Opportunity Knocks" as Medhurst describes it,<sup>41</sup> Tommy is introduced to such material as biscuit tin tap dancing, old ladies performing with dogs, dancing identical twins, the talking backwards man and a leprechaun playing the bagpipes. The film's nostalgia for music hall traditions is underlined by figuring Blackpool itself as on the declining end of better times. As Tommy gazes at Blackpool from the car drive into town, the lawyer explains that once it was a mecca for such stars as Sammy Davis Junior and Bob Hope. Tony Bennett has argued that the relationship with America which Blackpool has historically constructed for itself, has indeed been one in which the Lancashire town proudly situates itself as "being in advance of the rest of Britain in anticipating, implementing ahead of its time" the latest popular entertainments from across the Atlantic.<sup>42</sup> While Blackpool's celebration of modernity can be traced back to an indigenous regional bourgeoisie rooted in the industrial revolution, the decline of manufacturing in the last thirty years has meant that the town's connection to modernity has been increasingly disembedded and rearticulated "with the modernity of an abstracted international capitalism shorn of any specifically regional

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<sup>41</sup> A. Medhurst, "Unhinged Invention" in Sight and Sound October, 1995, p.7.

<sup>42</sup> T. Bennett, "Hegemony, ideology, pleasure: Blackpool" in Popular Culture and Social Relations (eds) T. Bennett, C. Mercer and J. Woollacott, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1986, p.142.

associations.”<sup>43</sup> Funny Bones explores what has been left behind in this process. It is, in contrast to Local Hero very much more rooted in a specific local culture.<sup>44</sup>

In Local Hero, Mac’s sentimentality for the rabbit provides the seed which will grow into a fully blown enchantment with nature. The specific quality of this enchanted gaze, I suggested, was its rejection of science and materialism (in both the Thatcherite sense, i.e. greed) and the Marxist sense of the word (Gramsci’s practical transformation of reality). Like Mac, upon his arrival in Blackpool, Tommy’s gaze is acquisitive (although far more sardonic than Mac’s). Just as Mac’s acquisitive purpose in Ferness sits uneasily with his sentimentalism, so Tommy’s nostalgic memories of his early years in Blackpool, contrasts with his own acquisitive purpose and gaze in the present. However, like Mac he will undergo a transformation, triggered not by nature directly, but by more natural, authentic cultural forms. The relationship between music hall traditions and the institutions and cinematic codes of cinema has always been problematic and unequal<sup>45</sup> but Funny Bones is nostalgic for a time when music hall traditions and the mass media can be figured as at least having some symbiosis. As Medhurst notes, one way of negotiating these cultural modes was to find sufficient spaces within particular film genres (like the musical or the comedy romance) for music hall stars to sing.<sup>46</sup> In Funny Bones, Tommy’s search for comic material provides the narrative motivation for providing the space for Jack’s dramatic sketch at a club.

This sketch is worth discussing in detail as it condenses a number of themes within the film around comedy and cultural forms. Called “Valve Radio”, Jack’s sketch involves miming the various programmes which an old fashioned and faulty radio switches between. The sketch symbolically reappropriates the radio as a mass medium for lampooning by the music hall performer. Specifically, what is happening is that the compartmentalised sounds of the airwaves (a boxing match, keep fit, a travelogue, adverts, etc) are absorbed and intermingled in a single body where gender and genre distinctions are collapsed in pantomimic excess.

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<sup>43</sup> T. Bennett, *ibid*, p.146.

<sup>44</sup> A. Medhurst, “Unhinged Invention” *op.cit.* p.10.

<sup>45</sup> A. Medhurst, “Music Hall and British Cinema” in All Our Yesterdays, 90 Years of British Cinema BFI, London, 1992, pp.168-188.

<sup>46</sup> A. Medhurst, “Music Hall and British Cinema” *ibid*, p.174.

The film posits two types of comedians, a funny bones comedian and a non-funny bones comedian. The former is funny, the humour deriving from their physical actions, while the latter is audibly funny; they tell jokes. The music hall tradition, which silent cinema drew upon for its comedy sketches, <sup>47</sup> is constructed as the more authentic source of humour, while the joke teller is a product of the mass entertainment industry. This distinction is underpinned by a latent, implicit thesis. Humour itself has been rationalised, its carnival dimension lost as it has been broken down, rationalised and programmed like labour generally, divided into segments for exchange and a controlled, safe consumption by the audience. In this context, the rejection of speech, the rerouting of communication through the body, taps into and rearticulates pre-Oedipal energies that subvert the disciplines which routinely constitute the self. For example, the normal conventions of everyday life are upended in the Parker brothers' sketch of a restaurant scene where waiter and customer relations collapse. Here the carnivalesque erupts from the body, transforming it into a spasmodic body disrupting surrounding conventions in much the same way that Jerry Lewis was admired for (particularly by the French).

Jack's act however is interrupted when the club owner is informed by Detective Sharkey about Jack's past. Sharkey is part of a crime sub plot (involving French characters) which need not detain us. His main significance is that he represents the law's prohibition on Jack performing. Jack's flashbacks have returned us to an earlier time in his life which, in contrast to Tommy's, are far from idyllic. The location is the circus/music hall where Jack is working with Bruno, his estranged wife, Katie and his uncle, Thomas. We see Jack involved in a routine with Francisco, Katie's lover, in which the comic violence between the two turns to real violence. Jack will later replay the sketch for Tommy, whereby one character repeatedly hits another over the head with a rolled up newspaper. The other responds with a single blow of a newspaper, from which the first character does not recover. After the blow is given, an iron bar is slid down the sleeve of the second character (Jack in this instance) and through the newspaper onto the floor. The audience is willing to believe that the bar was in the rolled up newspaper at the moment the first blow was struck.

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<sup>47</sup> M. Chanan, The dream that kicks. The prehistory and early years of cinema in Britain Routledge, London, 1996, p.131.

The sketch and the joke itself is a perfect example of the relations that can exist between humour and that simmering anger which goes so awry for Tommy in Las Vegas and which explodes so fatally between Jack and Francisco. Where as Tommy's rage in Las Vegas is against an omnipotent commercially successful father figure, which leaves him diminished, Jack's by contrast might be seen to stem from a father who has too *little* cultural, social or sexual power and who transfers that 'castration' onto his son. Thus although the film insists that Tommy and Jack are opposites, there is a thread connecting them around their respective relationships with their fathers and how that effects their comedy. This is a film about relationships with fathers and beyond that, one's position within modernity (Tommy) or outside it (Jack). In the case of Jack, the death of Francisco results in Jack, Bruno and Thomas's expulsion from even the marginal circuits which Blackpool has to offer.

And yet this trio are Blackpool's most talented physical comedians, something which Tommy immediately understands when he sees Jack's aborted radio sketch. He sets up a meeting with them. Katie attends and tries to persuade Bruno and Thomas not to sign the contracts which give Tommy exclusive ownership of the acts. "Either they want to trade or they don't" Tommy declares when she challenges him. They are desperate for the money and so sign. The audition however is quickly aborted when Tommy realises that the acts are not original even if they are original to Bruno, Thomas and Jack. For his father, George, has already used and popularised the very same sketches. Thus even in his plans to expropriate the comic labour of others, Tommy comes second best to his father who has got there before him.

A series of interconnections between the Fawkes' and the Parkers' now becomes apparent and with it the means of some sort of reconciliation between the torn halves of the film's diegetic world. It transpires that George Fawkes worked with the Parkers during his time in Blackpool, returning to America after an affair with Katie. She, pregnant with George's child, gives birth to Jack, who it now transpires, is Tommy's half brother. As George explains it to Tommy, he used the Parkers's act as a way into the industry before, as he laments, the industry transformed him into "a jokeman." There is a real pain and anger permeating the film's nostalgia

which contrasts with Local Hero. While that film could only in its final scenes hint at the profoundly unfulfilled desires of the characters, Funny Bones is far more centrally concerned with the fact that, as Tommy puts it, "it wasn't all sunshine and smiles for them [the Parkers]." Similarly, Local Hero has a typically Ealingesque timidity about violence, only hinting at it when the villagers follow Ben Knox back to his beach hut one night. The threat however is dissipated by the arrival of Mr Happer by helicopter. Funny Bones by contrast, makes the question of violence and its expression part and parcel of its valorisation of the anarchic, unpredictable, subversive qualities of the body with "funny bones".

With the arrival of George Fawkes and the half brothers re-united as a comedy team, the stage is set for some sort of reconciliation and conclusion. George uses his power and influence to get Bruno and Thomas a top billing, while Tommy and Jack prepare a surprise appearance. Just as the tragic sketch with Francisco merged performance with real life, so Jack arrives on stage being chased by real policemen, to the delight of the audience. He climbs a pole with an old fashioned blue police lamp atop and begins a series of dangerous stunts. The crowd watches, teetering on the thin line between entertainment and fear, between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, as this wild anarchic figure lampoons and abuses the law. Tommy, dressed as a policeman, climbs the pole. They stage a fight, and just as Tommy appears to be falling to his death - this time his literal rather than stage death - Jack grabs his hand and the audience applaud wildly (including the police). Jack has found redemption and Tommy has found some appreciation from the audience.

## **Conclusion**

In both Local Hero and Funny Bones we see a similar articulation of Britishness when it is juxtaposed to a version of American national identity. The two versions of national identity each call the other into being or meaning; they are dependent on each other. In these films, American identity is haunted by an almost guilty sense of loss. Both films stage a scenario in which the past is characterised by an American appropriation of something which belonged to the British characters (Knox oil by Mr Happer's father, the Parker brothers' act by George Fawkes). In both films

this appropriation comes back to haunt and undermine the sons of the fathers involved in the original appropriation. In *Happer* (and for the text itself) this incompleteness manifests itself in an attempt to relativise the corporate world and find some signifier of value other than exchange. Again, in *Funny Bones* we have a similar structure whereby the authenticity of the present is called into question by a past appropriation which is, in this instance, simply theft. The price to be paid here manifests itself in Tommy's problematic relationship with his father and with the world of comedy in general (his father tells him that he is just not funny). Despite the problematic relationship which both Tommy and Mr Happer have with their inheritance, the narratives of both films appear to be replaying the original act of appropriation in the present (will Ben Knox sign away his beach? will the Parkers have their act stolen a second time?). In both films the inheritance for the American characters (capital and fame) is incomplete, there is something missing. Thus the narrative does not replay the original appropriation but instead arrives at a different settlement. In *Local Hero* this is achieved first through Mac's growing ambivalence to the corporate agenda and then through the father figure of Happer and his negotiations with Ben Knox. In *Funny Bones* an alternative settlement is achieved first through Tommy's recognition that his father, "Mr Originality", stole ideas, and then, as a consequence of this, through George's reconciliation with the Parkers.

In each film, travel marks a rupture, a separation from an original authenticity. The narrative stages a physical return which is also a metaphorical journey and transformation. Happer is excited that Mac is returning to "the old country" and although this mistakenly refers to Mac's supposed genealogy, it also refers to the origins of Knox oil itself. Whether Ben Knox is actually related to the original founder of Knox oil is immaterial. His meeting with Happer marks a symbolic reunification where the local and the global, the past, present and future are seamlessly realigned. *Funny Bones* is a far less ideological text: it has little commitment to multinational capitalism and is less simplistically nostalgic than *Local Hero*. But like that film, *Funny Bones* is also concerned with genealogy. Once again we see the characteristic temporal dynamics of modernism diagnosed by Walter Benjamin.<sup>48</sup> The rupture with the

<sup>48</sup> W. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A lyric Poet in the Age of High Capitalism*, New Left Books, London, 1973.

immediate past which is unusable (Tommy's relationship with his father in America) requires a return to a more distant past (an archaic Blackpool, childhood flashbacks, organic comedy). This return, a movement in space as well as time, reunites Tommy with the half brother he never realised he had. As with Local Hero, this genealogical travel attempts to reconcile not only two individuals, but two social orders and cultures whose asymmetry testifies to the combined and uneven development of capitalist modernity and its disjunctures between rationalisation and desire, alienation and authenticity. The movement in time however also marks an attempt to reconcile past and present. There is a strong conservation discourse in Local Hero but even Funny Bones is at one level an attempt to conserve past archaic entertainment forms. This conservationist theme is a point of articulation with debates about the importance and meaning of the past, which took off with the growth of the so called heritage industry in the 1980s. In those debates, writers, as I have been here, have been concerned with the way the past works as a critical commentary or affirmation of the present or a mixture of the two. <sup>49</sup>

In Local Hero there is a strong sense of American capitalism reaching into and corroding the community; in Funny Bones there is a sense that the original story of theft is an allegory of the mass entertainment industry's exploitation and marginalisation of the kind of comedy and entertainment community which Blackpool represents. As with Ferness, it is an authentic community whose authenticity relies on it not being commercially exploited. There is a long tradition of seeing the music hall as the cultural correlate to the organic community. While it was itself an early example of the industrialisation of culture, its meaning is determined by its favourable comparison with the more modern rationalised culture industries which supplanted it. <sup>50</sup> When George travels back to America with the Parkers' act his fortunes are transformed while the Parkers continue to eke out a more marginal living as performers until Jack kills Francisco. As in the case of Stella and Urquhart, there is a certain foreclosing on desire, ambition and change (at least for the better) as the price to be paid for authenticity. In Local Hero the text can do little except register that price in the

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<sup>49</sup> See R. Hewison, The Heritage Industry, Methuen, London, 1987; D. Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985; and P. Wright, On Living in an Old Country, Verso, London, 1985.

<sup>50</sup> A. Medhurst, "Music Hall and British Cinema" *op.cit.*, pp.185-187.



disappointment of the Urquharts. In Funny Bones a more complex manoeuvre is performed. The sense of marginalisation, exploitation and unfulfilled promise is articulated in the contrast between America and Britain. But then Jack's story which culminates in a legal prohibition on the Parkers introduces an impediment which can be transcended in the final scene without compromising authenticity. This is because the law represents a merely external obstacle where as capitalist modernity represents a systemic force, colonising the subject's core sense of self. As George admits to Tommy: "I got lazy using writers, not using me. We were funny people, we didn't have to tell funny stories: we were funny, we had funny bones."

# **Gendered Travels**

As we have seen, the post-1979 period saw an expansion and extension of capital into areas of social, political, cultural and psychical life on a scale which made the term 'globalisation' a kind of *leitmotif* for the changes taking place. The extension of capital was inextricably combined with a recomposition of capital-labour relations which impacted upon the traditional gendered divisions of labour, principally between paid (wage) labour and unpaid labour (housework). The latter represents, as Wallerstein notes, a direct subsidy to the employers.<sup>1</sup> However, as Avtāh Brah writes:

"The emergent new international division of labour depends quite crucially upon women workers. Indeed, whether working in electronic factories, textile sweatshops, performing outwork from their homes, or (rather more untypically) holding jobs in the commanding heights of the economy - women have become *emblematic figures* of contemporary regimes of accumulation." (My emphasis)<sup>2</sup>

Essentially a sizable decline in the manufacturing base (traditionally male), the growth of the service sector (traditionally female) and the shift towards part-time and 'flexible' contracts saw a growth in the number of women in all sectors of the labour market, including the professions under pressure from the modernist principle of universality that feminism was extending to women. At least a selection of feminist *ideas* received some popular dissemination in the 1980s although often this commodification meant that their *relationship* to feminism was downplayed.<sup>3</sup> Identities for women and men and relations between them become increasingly contradictory as the conflict between established roles and expectations and new roles and expectations comes into play. The texts I have selected will explore and to varying degrees reproduce these contradictions. A key theme of *Aliens*, the position of women vis-a-vis wage labour and the family will be (re)explored in relation to British produced film culture. These texts also make a distinction between men who are sensitive to the desires of women and men who are not. This distinction keys into debates around the 'New Man' which

<sup>1</sup> I. Wallerstein, "The Ideological Tensions of Capitalism: Universalism versus Racism and Sexism." in E. Balibar and I. Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class, Ambiguous Identities* Verso, London, 1991, p.34.

<sup>2</sup> A. Brah, *Cartographies of diaspora, contesting identities*, Routledge, London, 1996, p.179.

<sup>3</sup> L. Gammon in "Watching The Detectives" notes how a *Cagney and Lacey* appreciation society preferred to disavow the series' connection with feminism. See, *The Female Gaze, Women As Viewers of Popular Culture* (eds) L. Gammon and M. Marshment, The Women's Press, London, 1988, pp.25-26.

emerged as a response to feminism in the 1980s. As we shall see, this distinction is rather double edged, ideologically speaking. The increasing presence of women in public life also contributed to a rehabilitation of popular culture with which women and femininity had, in certain discourses, been equated: fantasy and desire, in the context of the new regimes of consumption discussed in chapter two, become key terms within critical discourses and cultural practices.

The films that I have selected to discuss gender more explicitly have greater narrative space for women than in the previous chapter. They are, Yanks (J. Schlesinger, 1979), Another Time, Another Place (M. Radford, 1983), A Letter To Brezhnev. (C. Bernard, 1985), A Room With A View, (J. Ivory, 1985) and Shirley Valentine, (L. Gilbert, 1989). Women are (with the possible exception of Yanks) our main point of narrative focalisation in these films. Indeed Justine King sees such films as part of the revived "women's film" in British cinema.<sup>4</sup> The fact that this shift is accompanied by a greater role for romance (in contrast with Local Hero and Funny Bones) is itself a cultural assumption that should not be taken as 'natural', but as a symptom of the traditional gendered division of labour. Production, historically, the site of male wage labour, has been articulated with scientific rationality, while unwaged domestic labour (childrearing and homemaking), historically overwhelmingly female, has been articulated with consumption and the emotional values alien to producer competition. Thus the male dominated narratives of Local Hero and Funny Bones turn on property, theft, business, economic success and the extent to which work can be a satisfying 'authentic' experience. Work is an acknowledged role and pressure in the lives of many of the female characters in the films discussed in this chapter, but interestingly, there is rather less commitment to reuniting wage labour with a more authentic self. Perhaps this would be welcome were it not for the fact that the search for authenticity in these films is found not in work but (with the exception of Shirley Valentine) in heterosexual romance. It is in this sense that the figure of the sensitive man in these films is ideologically ambivalent and will require us to also reevaluate that hoary old couplet of British cinema studies: realism and fantasy. This, together with the focus on gender, will also mean re-engaging with the psychoanalytic work of Jessica Benjamin. I suggested in chapter

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<sup>4</sup> J. King, "Crossing Thresholds: The Contemporary British Women's Film" in Dissolving Views, Key Writings On British Cinema (ed) A. Higson, Cassell, London, 1996.

two, that we can read the reconstruction of the family in Aliens as an attempt to open up a social space for mutuality and nurture. In this chapter, it is the past or archaic social relations which activate a renegotiation of gender roles.

All but one of these films is either set in the past ( Yanks, and Another Time, Another Place, are set during the Second World War) or involve travel to a place which is also a temporal movement back in time to a more 'primitive' arena of action ( Shirley Valentine), or both: A Room With A View is set in the past of Victorian England but also involves travel to the archaic terrain of 'underdeveloped' Italy. The exception is A Letter To Brezhnev which is set in the 1980s and involves travel from and ultimately to a parallel modernity, neither past nor future. This film aside, the others are interested in the past or 'pastness' for its social turbulence and/or ability to crystallise social and individual change particularly in terms of gendered relations. Yet this constellation with the past as a means of dramatising change in the 1980s is combined with narratives in which change appears minimal, nonexistent, successfully resisted by established social relations or possible only outside British borders. The one exception to this is A Room With A View, something that will need accounting for. In a word, the *resignation* of Gordon and Stella Urquhart in Local Hero, is a recurrent motif in British cinema.

## **Realism and Fantasy**

The importance of romance in these films and narratives about escaping one's socially determined position, raises the question of realism and fantasy. It is well known (and as I discussed in chapter one) that for many decades, realism was by far the privileged term in critical discourses. We have already seen in chapter two that for a complex of political, social, economic and cultural reasons, the 1980s saw an intensifying interest in popular culture and consumption. In film studies the BFI dossier on Gainsborough Melodrama <sup>5</sup> tapped into these seismic shifts, particularly (given its generic focus) its gender components. From the 1980s onwards, fantasy, desire, pleasure and excess, began to be rehabilitated in film studies and challenges mounted to the dominance of the realist aesthetic in

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<sup>5</sup> S. Aspinall and R. Murphy (eds), Gainsborough Melodrama BFI, London, 1983.

critical assumptions.<sup>6</sup> An increasing interest in popular culture brought with it a playing down of totalising theoretical ambitions.<sup>7</sup> Together with realism, the term ideology in particular, fell out of favour. Perhaps now the stage has been reached where the critical evaluations have been reversed and realism is now designated as 'bad' while fantasy (unlike realism, a term that can be used with fewer underlying and totalising arguments concerning the nature of the real world) taken as the sign of an upsurge of desire and transgression (particularly female desire and transgression in such genres as the melodrama and the historical film) equals 'good'.<sup>8</sup>

One way of deconstructing this binary opposition is by acknowledging that while the realism/fantasy couplet refers to specific aesthetic practices which mark themselves as "realistic" or "fantastic", they also refer to *overlapping processes* that are at work in cultural consumption generally. Realism - understood as cognitive decodings of the world, is at play across all aesthetic practices, including those that mark themselves as fantasy. Conversely, the processes associated with fantasy, which involve identification, libidinal drives and transgression, are also at play across all aesthetic practices, including, as we shall see, those that mark themselves out as located in a "realist" tradition.

Further, we should resist equating realism and fantasy, as aesthetic practices or general processes, with the reality principle and the pleasure principle respectively. Realism need not always be the vehicle by which the characters' resignation to the status quo, to the reality principle, is achieved. Cognitive decodings, for example, the changing role of women in public life, may open up transgressive possibilities in ways which fantasy, often mobilised in quite conservative ways during the 1980s British cinema, may close down. For fantasy is not always a conductor of the pleasure principle in any simple unmediated sense. Very often it involves the female characters in one kind of transgression (sexual romance) but another kind of reconciliation with the reality principle (subordination to another male desire). We should be careful not to equate fantasy with pure liberation, a position which simply reverses the negative judgement of an older (male

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<sup>6</sup> A. Higson, "Critical Theory And 'British Cinema'" in *Screen* vol.24, no.4-5, 1983.

<sup>7</sup> A.O'Shea and B.Schwarz, "Reconsidering Popular Culture" in *Screen*, vol.28, no.3, 1987.

<sup>8</sup> P. Cook, *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema*, BFI, London, 1996, may be taken as an example of a somewhat uncritical celebration of the concept of fantasy.

dominated) critical tradition which associated it with trivial distraction (Leavisism) and false consciousness (Marxism).

Just as fantasy is not pure wish-fulfilment, so realism, as an epistemology or aesthetic strategy, is not simply an 'objective mapping' of the social order. My point here is not primarily the older - and still valid - objection to a bogus objectivity which conceals its political interests, but rather that realism too has *libidinal* as well as political investments. Documentary theory is beginning to explore this area. Nichols has talked of the genre in terms of a desire for knowledge,<sup>9</sup> while Winston has wondered if there are not more rawly libidinal dynamics (voyeurism, sadism) behind the documentary gaze.<sup>10</sup>

All I want to register here is that by definition, all aesthetic realisms, despite their frequent investment in 'objectivity' and its stylistic correlation in the long shot, share a desire to get *close* to things, to bring the sign and its referent into some kind of relationship, some kind of temporary reconciliation. Consider the great Italian Neo-Realist scriptwriter, Cesare Zavattini's formulation of this tension:

"I must concentrate all my attention on the man of today. The historical baggage that I carry within myself must not prevent me from being what I wish to be, neither from using the means I have at hand to deliver this man from his pain. This man - and this is one of my basic and fixed ideas - has a first and last name. He is part of a society in a way that concerns us, make no mistake about that. I feel his fascination. I must feel it in such a way that I am urgently obliged to speak to him, but not as a character of my imagination's invention. It is exactly at that moment one must beware, for it is then that the imagination attempts to come between reality and the self."<sup>11</sup>

Despite that final warning against subjectivity, there is a great deal of

<sup>9</sup> B. Nichols, Representing Reality Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> See B. Winston "Not A Lot Of Laughs: Documentary and Public Service" and T. Krzywinska, "Dissidence and Authenticity in Dyke Porn and Actuality TV" both in Dissident Voices, The Politics of Television and Cultural Change (ed) M. Wayne, Pluto Press, London, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> M Liehm, Passion and Defiance: Films in Italy, 1942 to the present University College Press, Berkeley, 1984, p. 105.

emphasis here on intimate particularity (first and last names), on interconnectedness (the subject is of concern to us), on empathy, feeling and communicativeness. This aspiration to get close has a powerful libidinal charge. It is worth quoting from Herbert Marcuse's discussion of Freud to see how this fantasy of solidarity, this imagined community, this attempt to depict society which is so central to realisms of every hue, is rooted in the pleasure principle:

"When Freud ascribes the goal of "uniting the organic in ever greater units," of "producing and preserving ever greater units" to the sexual drives, this striving is at work in every process that preserves life, from the first union of the germ cells to the formation of cultural communities: society and nation. This drive stands under the aegis of the pleasure principle: it is precisely the polymorphous character of sexuality that drives beyond the special function to which it is limited, toward gaining more intensive and extensive pleasure, toward the generation of libidinous ties with one's fellow men, [sic] the production of a libidinous, that is, happy environment. Civilisation arises from pleasure: we must hold fast to this thesis in all its provocativeness." <sup>12</sup>

I have already argued that the organic community at O.C.1 is a fantasy which envisages the "generation of libidinous ties". But the organic community also has another "face" - O.C.2, which represents a social order (now marked by division, by hierarchy, by boundaries enforcing renunciation) which has forgotten that civilisation, or community, "arises from pleasure". Now I am arguing that realism too, both as an aesthetic practice and as a set of cognitions about the world, has a similar ambivalence: on the one hand it harbours a libidinous motivation to get close, to close the gap (between subject and object, sign and referent), to forge what Jessica Benjamin called an intersubjective space, where the separations, division and boundaries of the social and symbolic order are overcome. On the other hand (and this is particularly true within British cinema) realism often ends up as an apology for the very social order it maps, reconciling its characters and the spectator to the social and

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<sup>12</sup> H. Marcuse, 5 Lectures, Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia Allen Lane/Penguin Press, London, 1970, p.19.



symbolic order as it is. <sup>13</sup>

Within Lacanian psychoanalysis, the key term describing an ontological division within the subject is *lack*, which is conceived as a universal and a-historical given. Marcuse's Marxist reading of Freud suggests we use another term, not lack, but, I would suggest, *scarcity*. Under capitalism resources are scarce because they are distributed so unevenly and one-sidedly. The uneven distribution of material and emotional resources is increasingly the result not of underdeveloped forces of production but the specific social relations of domination which require scarcity to maintain the exchange value of commodities (scarcity of jobs to keep the price of labour down, scarcity of money to keep inflation down, scarcity of public housing to keep private property prices high, scarcity of libidinal relationships in the public sphere - hence the pairing down of the welfare state) for the benefit of a super rich elite. Thus while renunciation is inevitable if the subject is to become a subject and enter any social and symbolic order, under capitalism, emotional and material scarcity results in what Marcuse called surplus (that is historically unnecessary) repression. <sup>14</sup> Not only are material and psychical resources distributed unevenly, they are also distributed *one-sidedly*, so that like Janus, capitalism has two faces. The other side of scarcity is overproduction, the prelude to economic slump. There is a psychical correlation here in the over-investments we are encouraged to make in normative relations such as the Law of the Father, the family and heterosexuality; the basis for psychical instability.

But why should the *libidinal* roots of desire matter to Marxism? Because, as Marcuse suggested in his discussion of Freud, there is, and needs to be, a psychical basis for a socialist society based on a different conception of the body and its emotional and physical needs. Marcuse argued for the importance of a stage in the individual psyche, which provides a primary energy for any future emancipation and he located this stage *prior* to the psyche's "conquest" by the reality principle (reformulated by Marcuse as the performance principle, the reality principle as a historically specific and

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<sup>13</sup> In this sense, realism draws on a common and everyday meaning where being "realistic" is actually a pragmatic reconciliation with the status quo because no other option appear possible. See Raymond Williams' discussion of realism in *Key Words* Fontana Press, London, 1988, p.259.

<sup>14</sup> H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization, A philosophical inquiry into Freud* Ark Paperbacks, London, 1987, p.35.

therefore alterable set of social arrangements).<sup>15</sup> Anticipating later explorations of the pre-Oedipal stage, Marcuse tracks a “lost relation between ego and reality” when the latter was not founded upon renunciation of desire, or on the split between subject and object. This is the “maternal” relation between the embryonic ego and the mother’s body, where “the primary experience of reality is that of a libidinous union.”<sup>16</sup>

As we have seen in chapter two, Jessica Benjamin recognises Marcuse’s affirmation of “the desire for unity with the bounteous mother against the rational reality principle of the father,” but she questions his acceptance of the discourse of gender domination that constructs an antithesis between mother and father, fusion and difference.<sup>17</sup> For Benjamin, the pre-Oedipal phase is not to be equated solely with the denial of difference. Benjamin argues that it is an intersubjective space between mother and baby (prior to firmly delineated gender identities), where the first inclinations of self and other are fostered, but in a fluid, permeable way.<sup>18</sup> In other words, Benjamin is raising the question of conceiving (interpersonal) borders and boundaries in a less fixed, rigid, binary manner than is typical once the subject has past through the Oedipal stage. One reason why the pre-Oedipal phase has been cast as a realm of pure fusion and non-differentiation has been because the Father can then be privileged as a pathway to separation and individuation.<sup>19</sup> But as Jessica Benjamin reminds us, this process of individuation, the Oedipal trajectory, is gendered so that it “evolves in response to the mother’s lack of subjectivity, with which the girl identifies and the boy disidentifies.”<sup>20</sup> The different aptitudes and capacities conventionally ascribed to masculinity and femininity are split apart and assigned to men and women. This is the foundation for gender polarity, which “maintains the overvaluation of one side, the denigration of the other.”<sup>21</sup> Femininity is divorced from desire, subjectivity and agency, masculinity is divorced from the capacity to nurture, from emotional attunement, from the ability to perceive the needs of others. The other is

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<sup>15</sup> H. Marcuse, *ibid*, p.130.

<sup>16</sup> H. Marcuse, *ibid*, p. 230.

<sup>17</sup> J. Benjamin, The Bonds Of Love, Psychoanalysis, feminism and the problem of domination Virago, London, 1990, p.177.

<sup>18</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.127.

<sup>19</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.148.

<sup>20</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.85.

<sup>21</sup> J. Benjamin, p.167.

transformed into the polarised Other.

Against this gender polarity, Benjamin is concerned to analyse psychical development in a way that does not simply reinforce gender relations as immutable. The Oedipal trajectory as it is usually described is based on a unilinear model in which separation is equated with individuation while also excluding “all dependency from the definition of autonomy.”<sup>22</sup> The model is based on the “assumption that we grow *out of* relationships rather than becoming more active and sovereign *within* them.”<sup>23</sup> Against this self evidently bourgeois individualistic emphasis, Benjamin orients her psychoanalytic theory towards the dynamics between self and other. Her emphasis on intersubjectivity leads to a redrafting of the “map of the mind” in order to explore “that space in which we know, discover, and create the world through our connection to it.”<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the concept of intersubjectivity has a critical edge, for the “mutual recognition that allows self and other to meet as sovereign equals” is precisely what breaks down under the Law of the Father where “the exchange of recognition” is transformed “into domination and submission.”<sup>25</sup>

Let us just recap the discussion so far. In deconstructing the binary opposition between realism and fantasy, I suggested that the latter may be articulated with the reality principle, while the relationship between realism and the pleasure principle, has often been overlooked. Using Marcuse we saw a connection between the “formation of communities” which realisms aspire to depict and the “generation of libidinous ties”. I then used Jessica Benjamin to develop a greater sense of what, in practice (and Marcuse was very vague on this) such libidinous ties might mean. Benjamin’s concepts of intersubjectivity, mutuality, nurture and emotional attunement are important here. Her re-theorisation of the pre-Oedipal phase and the individual’s transition to an Oedipal identity, traces how an embryonic intersubjectivity and mutuality is replaced with subject/object relations, with firm delineations or boundaries containing the individual subject, marking them off from (and repelling) the Other, marking the family off from the public sphere, marking the wider community (usually the nation) off

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<sup>22</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.162.

<sup>23</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, pp.192-3.

<sup>25</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.12.

from its external Others. Just as the return to the past or the mobilisation of archaic relations may activate a repressed pre-Oedipal intersubjectivity, so we can also see how geo-cultural metaphors of space, borders, boundaries, and travel have important psychoanalytic resonances.

Benjamin explicitly uses such metaphors, exploring relatedness as “the territory in which subjects meet” <sup>26</sup> and paying particular attention to the way that territory is stacked in gender terms to the detriment of both men and women. In her discussion of Imperial travels, Mary Louise Pratt identifies a similar territory of “contact zones”, the site of intercultural dialogues within “highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.” <sup>27</sup> While paying attention to the contact zones between traveller and native in these films and their gendered implications for male/female relations, I also want to pay attention to other, sometimes less foregrounded female-to-female relations which the Oedipal trajectory also has difficulty accommodating.

Indeed to return to the question of the inscription of libidinal desire within the aesthetic strategies of realism, I would suggest that one of the ‘fantasies’ of the films under discussion is precisely the question of *female intersubjectivity*, the identification of shared experiences, solidarities and problems between women; the construction that is, of the female gaze. <sup>28</sup> A single scene from A Letter To Brezhnev illustrates this. Theresa and Elaine are shown sharing a loo in a disco, discussing their dates for the night. One is employed in a dehumanising factory, the other is unemployed. Together they represent the two sides of an alienated labour process. Yet emotionally, physically they are getting close, a point underscored for the spectator by the unusual location of the scene (sharing a cubicle) and the quotidian detail (having a piss) usually left out of the frame, constructed in this instance via an overhead wide angle shot. These indeed are the signifiers of ‘realism’ by which the spectator feels the *frisson* of sign and referent coming into close alignment. From this perspective we may say that the film’s true ‘fantasy’ of a shared *collective* experience is inscribed within the film’s ‘realist’ aesthetic and that the fantasy component in the film (the

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<sup>26</sup> J. Benjamin, *ibid*, p.25.

<sup>27</sup> M. L. Pratt, Imperial Eyes, travel writing and transculturation Routledge, London, 1992, p.4.

<sup>28</sup> See The Female Gaze op.cit., for a collection of essays that explores the possibilities as well as blockages for such a gaze as a counter to the somewhat monolithic psychoanalytic conceptions of cinema and patriarchy formulated in the 1970s.

heterosexual romance which drives a wedge between female solidarity) is inscribed with the gendered performance principle (find a man, get married, have children). Indeed I will suggest that in all the films discussed in this chapter, fantasy is conservatively yoked to what Lefebvre calls, a 'private' consciousness,<sup>29</sup> where the collective dimensions of desire are recontained within the gaze of the individual. The 'privatised' nature of fantasy in this chapter marks a key difference with the articulation of fantasy in the diasporic travels of the next chapter, where, as we shall see, there is a much stronger sense of its roots in the collective unconscious.

### **Walter Benjamin: Evolutionary and Dialectical Images**

Via Marcuse and Jessica Benjamin, we have seen how psychoanalytic theory can return to the ontogenetic past in order to call into question the Oedipal order. This is merely to say that the way the subject's distant past is mobilised and for what purposes, is a site of struggle. Crucially, Jessica Benjamin is concerned to find in the pre-Oedipal past, the remnants of a relationship between "a subject meeting another subject"<sup>30</sup> before the onset of the Oedipal trajectory and its psychical *splitting* between subject and object. This may be one reason why cinematic depictions of the past or archaic social relations within a contemporary setting, may hold out the possibility of renegotiating gender difference - the first difference/domination the subject learns.

Walter Benjamin found similarly ambivalent possibilities when he turned his attention to the historical past and the ways it can be mobilised to discharge affirmative or critical pulses into the present. What I want to do is try and articulate the two Benjamins together, so that we can link the socio-historical with the psychical. While Jessica Benjamin starts off thinking about the pre-Oedipal phase, she ends up thinking about the relationship between the repression of pre-Oedipal relations and the commodity form. With Walter Benjamin we can start with the commodity form before moving back to the individual's psychical history.

Benjamin's philosophy of history was neither arbitrary, subjective or ahistorical. It was formulated in the light of the key socioeconomic relations

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<sup>29</sup> H. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* Verso, London, 1991, pp. 148-150.

<sup>30</sup> J. Benjamin, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

of our epoch, namely the commodity form. This socioeconomic relation is based upon a fundamentally asymmetrical “contact zone” between labour and capital and it involves a material *splitting* between labour and its products. As Michael Taussig has put it, rather elegantly,

“the commodity, mused Marx, [is] a spectral entity out there, lording it over mere mortals who in fact, singly and collectively in intricate divisions of market-orchestrated interpersonal labour-contact and sensuous interaction with the object-world, bring aforesaid commodity into being. “<sup>31</sup>

The commodity is fetishised, invested with a power that does not appear to derive from how human beings organise their own social and economic relations. Instead it becomes an autonomous, “spectral entity out there” to which the human subject either bows down to in obescence to a rationalised set of institutional structures, or, when confronted with the commodity as consumer good, purchases (or not) on the basis of a private (enchanted) transaction. Either way, the commodity’s roots in collective life, have been hewn away. How can we relate this question of fetishism and domination to representations of history?

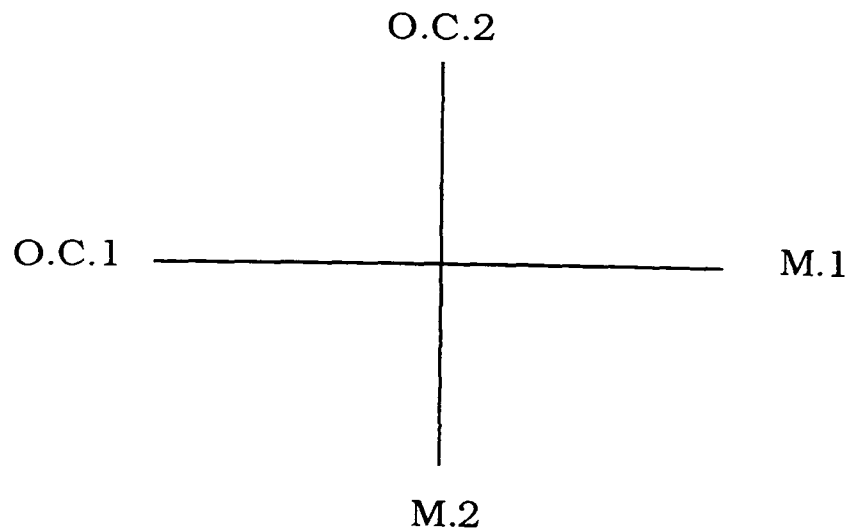
One of the ways in which human arrangements are fetishised is to legitimise them by linking them to the world of nature thus transferring the apparent ‘givenness’ of nature to the social world. This strategy requires an acknowledgement that modernity has betrayed its promises but via a loop back to some more “natural” order, it is revived. This fusion between past and present disavows the liberatory potential of the latter in favour of a return to a past with less productive potential to meet human needs, expand human potentiality and liberate the subject from the tyranny of scarcity imposed by nature. Conversely, the contemporary social order can be fetishised by locating the search for authenticity in the future. Here a linear historical line between an outmoded past (or present) and the modern present (or future) is drawn and this is the basis of any “modernisation” thesis or programme. This strategy, the strategy of the *tabula rasa*, disavows the fundamental repetition within the new, ensuring that social development takes place within the narrow continuum of current property relations.

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<sup>31</sup> M. Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity, A Particular History Of The Senses* Routledge, London, p.22.

In either case, a line has to be drawn between modernity and that which modernity is not, or at least, is no longer. Thus the *imagery* of a certain historical drama, the emergence from or juxtaposition of bourgeois modernity with a quasi-feudal scenario, is continually reenacted in British cinema. This primal scene is ambiguous in gender terms and much depends on whether the woman is the traveller or the native. The equation between geographical immobility and social immobility means that the organic community often figures as a site of constraint (Yanks, and Another Time Another Place): to what extent this inscribes an implicit (in the spectator's consciousness) or explicit (in the text itself) historical narrative of progress outside/beyond the organic community has yet to be ascertained. Conversely, narratives which involve women travellers often figure the organic community as a site of authenticity (A Room With A View and Shirley Valentine): to what extent this works to reconnect modernity ideologically (i.e. as a legitimization of arbitrarily unequal social relations) with a more natural order will also have to be ascertained.

In my analysis of Local Hero we can see how the film mobilises *both* aspects of this ideology of modernism. Old Knox represents the authentic, more natural past, while Happer represents the progress of modernity: the problem which the film sets itself is to bring these two dislocated halves together at precisely the right narrative moment so that one will not negate the other. The film achieves this while acknowledging a residue of desires which cannot be accommodated. Mac is wrenched away from the place that has returned to him some sense of authentic being, some sort of undivided relationship to nature/his nature, but for Stella of course, the reverse is true. She watches his helicopter leave while hanging out the washing, the longing in her gaze for an escape from the village is doubled by Mac's departure and the domestic chore she is undertaking. This ambivalence in the tradition/modernity couplet can be given diagrammatic form.



**Fig. One**

O.C.1 and M.1 represent the utopian representation of the organic community and modernity respectively, the exact nature of their 'positivity' will be determined by their contrast with the negative versions of modernity and the organic community (O.C.2 and M.2). Typically, characters are stuck at either O.C.2 (Stella) or M.2 (Mac). In narrative terms this axis constitutes the problem, the solution often being some attempt to move towards either the utopian promises of modernity, as in Stella's case, (M.1, if their starting point is O.C.2) or the utopian promises of the organic community, as in Mac's case, (O.C.1, if their starting point is M.2).

Against this evolutionary philosophy of history, Benjamin posited a dialectical philosophy, one which sought to simultaneously redeem the past and catapult humanity into a radically different future. A good example of Benjamin's methodology can be found in his visit to Moscow at the turn of the year 1926-1927. Benjamin sought out a constellation that could illuminate the tension between the need to build up an economic infrastructure as a prerequisite to deliver a greater degree of cultural consumption, and the fact that building up such an infrastructure necessarily postponed or deferred the desired goal. For it is in cultural consumption that utopian anticipation of the 'good life' and the pleasure principle are nourished in the individual and collective unconscious. This



was hugely prophetic given the skews towards arms production and heavy industry that was to subsequently dominate the Soviet economy at the expense of consumer goods. <sup>32</sup>

Benjamin found signs of the collective utopian hope for *abundance* in an image/reality from the distant past: the preindustrial, non-essentials for sale amongst Moscow's unlicensed street vendors: shoe polish, handkerchiefs, lacquered boxes, stuffed birds, and so on. <sup>33</sup> Needless to say, Benjamin was not, *a la* Leavis, arguing for a return to an artisanal past, but rather that in these little superfluous luxuries were stored the fantasy energy for a future emancipation from a merely *instrumental* present. The difference is crucial. While Leavis measured the gap between past and present in terms of decline, Benjamin saw the relation between past and present in terms of their *respective unrealised potential*. Where Leavis measured history in linear and evolutionary terms (albeit the lament of the anti-modernist) Benjamin followed Marx and saw history dialectically, where progress and regression are intimately bound together, where "everything seems pregnant with its contrary." <sup>34</sup>

We must note again how this particular example conforms to Benjamin's thesis that such wish-images manifest themselves not in the recent past, but in the *distant* past. If the recent past is contaminated, representing the very historical continuum which the wish-images strive to break free from, then the return to a more distant past *may* paradoxically, be an indication of the cultural and psychical resources which any revolutionary rupture in the present would need to draw on and tap. The return to the past may be a way of clearing a space in the imagination for a utopian reconfiguring of social relations, although, as with the realism/fantasy couplet, such a utopian representation does not simply transcend its own moment of enunciation. From this perspective, the cinematic representation of the past either as setting and/or as the result of narrative travels, acquires a certain political urgency.

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<sup>32</sup> W. Keega, *The Spectre Of Capitalism* , Vintage, London, 1993, pp.67-78.

<sup>33</sup> S. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics Of Seeing* MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989, p.29.

<sup>34</sup> K. Marx, quoted in E. Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism* , University of California Press, 1984, p.31.

## **The Holiday**

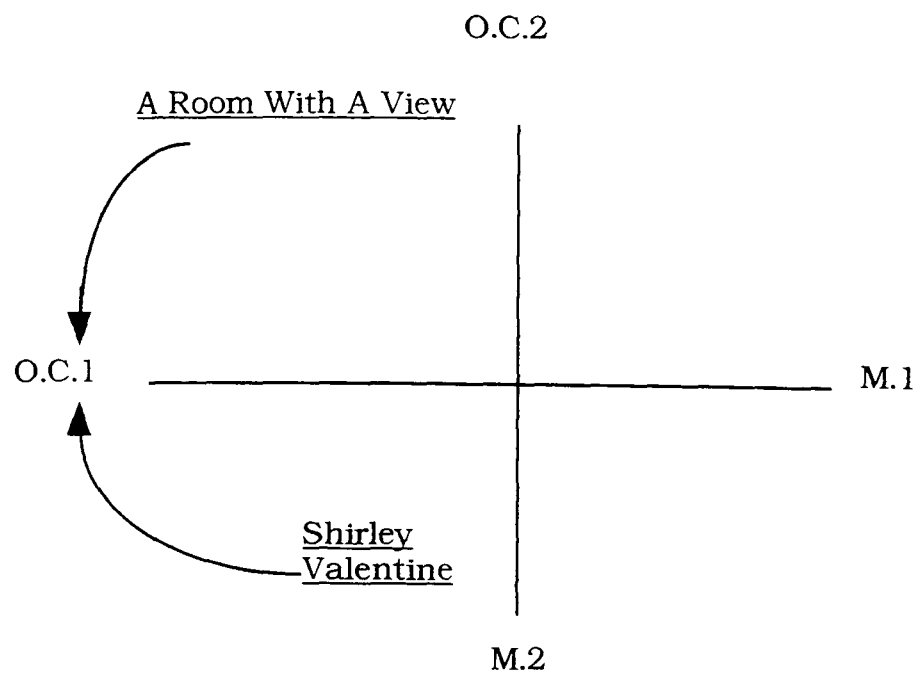
My discussion of the films in this chapter is divided initially between those narratives which figure women travelling and those narratives which figure men as the travellers. I begin with A Room With A View and Shirley Valentine, both of which involve women travelling as tourists while also being quite concerned to make a distinction between the traveller and the tourist. In doing so, both films mobilise and invoke certain types of *gazes* linked with tourism and both involve movements in time as well as space.

Urry defines the holiday as a temporary break from work/home, involving geographical movement into spaces/places that are not only out of the ordinary, but may be thought of as liminal zones where the codes of normal social experience are suspended or reversed, thus triggering fantasies and pleasures not easily accommodated back at home.<sup>35</sup> The paradoxical social meaning of the holiday is that it is undertaken and envisaged as a temporary disembedding from 'home' with no long term consequences. Yet the holiday is also often undertaken as a means of escaping certain stresses and problems at 'home', and so there is always the potential for the holiday to produce fundamental changes. Thus in both films, being in unfamiliar territory changes characters, calling into question aspects of their identities and forcing decisions which are transformative. In each case the questions which travel asks is linked to female desire and how mobility dislodges women from established social relationships.

Following my discussion of Stella and Mac in Local Hero we can begin by locating the main female protagonists at O.C.2 and M.2. The narratives of both films involve movement to O.C.1 represented by the liminal zone of the holidays which Lucy Honeychurch and Shirley Valentine make, respectively, to Italy and a Greek island (see Figure Two).

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<sup>35</sup> J. Urry, The Tourist Gaze Sage, London, 1990, pp.2-3 and 10.



**Figure Two**

I locate Honeychurch's trajectory as starting from O.C.2 because although it is represented as being more modern than backward Italy, for the spectator, Victorian Britain is clearly being portrayed as *requiring* modernisation (a key theme for both the Left and the Right in the 1980s) where as Shirley's problems appear to be the result of *too much* modernisation. The liminal zones which these characters travel to have some key characteristics of the ideologeme which I have identified as an important image of the traditional in British culture: the organic community. Like the organic community, these holiday destinations are more 'primitive' than home, the gap between reason and desire narrows and divisions of time and space appear less developed and oppressive.

In addition to the distinctions between O.C.2/M.2 and O.C.1, both films mobilise a distinction between the tourist and the traveller (the former never really gets to O.C.1) and between the interior and the exterior. The distinction between the tourist and the traveller is made by mapping them across another binary which both films mobilise, between what Urry calls the collective gaze and the romantic gaze. The romantic gaze is particularly associated with undisturbed natural beauty, and emphasises "solitude, privacy and a personal, semi-spiritual relationship with the object of the gaze." <sup>36</sup> By contrast the collective gaze depends on and acknowledges its roots in mass tourism and is unembarrassed by the presence of other people who are also tourists. The seaside resort and coach holiday are the

<sup>36</sup> J. Urry, The Tourist Gaze *ibid.*, p.45.

quintessential sites/sights of and for the collective gaze.<sup>37</sup> The romantic gaze tries to convince itself that *it* is the gaze of the traveller genuinely communing with a different place by marking itself off from the collective gaze. Both films view the collective gaze through the elitist optic of the romantic gaze, but the extent of their interface with the native is in fact quite superficial. In both films the collective gaze has an unmistakable association with the Imperial component of British national identity, that is it's fear of the Other. Yet this disavows the extent to which the desire inscribed into the *romantic gaze* is also complicit with another component of the Imperial gaze. As Stuart Hall argues:

“The idea that these are ‘closed’ places - ethnically pure, culturally traditional, undisturbed until yesterday by the ruptures of modernity - is a Western fantasy about ‘otherness’; a ‘colonial fantasy’ maintained *about* the periphery *by* the West, which tends to like its natives ‘pure’ and its exotic places untouched.”<sup>38</sup>

We will have to wait until the next chapter to discuss a positive representation of the more plebeian collective gaze and its mobilisation by Bhaji On The Beach, where we will also find a self conscious interrogation of the look of desire as well as fear.

The narrative trajectory of the heroine, Lucy Honeychurch in A Room With A View is one which moves from the restricted social order of late Victorian Britain, with its firmly delineated class distinctions and expectations for women, to a more ‘modern’ class and gendered order where the individual subject’s authentic desires are not snuffed out by social convention. This movement forward is achieved however via a movement ‘backwards’ in time. A Room With A View taps into the late C19th bourgeois vogue of romantic primitivism,<sup>39</sup> by beginning in underdeveloped Florence, Italy. It starts with a window opening out onto the anticipated spectacle of the city, except that the room in question, in a pensione, is facing in the wrong direction. The view instead is of a dismal back alley.

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<sup>37</sup> J. Urry, *ibid*, p.46 and p.95.

<sup>38</sup> S. Hall, “The Question Of Cultural Identity” in Modernity And Its Futures (eds) S. Hall, D. Held, T. McGrew, Polity/Open University Press, Cambridge, 1992, p.305.

<sup>39</sup> P. Fussell, Abroad, British literary travelling between the wars Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980, p.38.

The disappointment of the two female characters, Lucy Honeychurch and her chaperone, Charlotte, and the consequent fluster that the chaperone experiences when swapping rooms with Mr Emerson and his son George, pokes fun at the characters and their ambivalence to events and places not thoroughly administered and subject to British order. The British love of order is not simply of course an obsession with a neutral administrative regularity, but a component of a wider concern with social order and stability. For the C19th middle class, social order and stability was crucial for but also likely to be strained by, periods of economic growth <sup>40</sup> (or, with one constellating eye on the 1980s, economic restructuring).

Although it is an English pensione, the mix up in rooms, evidently suggests that the pensione has become suffused with a certain shambolic quality. Further, as the beginning and end of the film suggest, the pensione is a magnet for those English whose eccentricities make them particularly susceptible to influence by their new sensuous surroundings. The ideological project of the film is to achieve a reconciliation between the motif of the room, that interior space symbolising all the refinement, culture, and civilisation of bourgeois society, but also its repressions, with the motif of 'the view', the exterior space of nature where desire can be expressed unembarrassed by social conventions. This then is a British version of the civilisation/wilderness split in the American western genre. In both cases the interior/civilisation is associated with the feminine while the exterior/wilderness is associated with the masculine. And in both films, it is men who are linked with the natural landscape, a natural (pre-Oedipal) expressiveness and in relation to female desire, what Jessica Benjamin calls emotional attunement <sup>41</sup> (George in A Room With A View, Costas in Shirley Valentine).

There is also a link here with Walter Benjamin's own analysis of the C19th century bourgeois interior which keeps the nascent public space of the masses at bay but only at the cost of a claustrophobic confinement.<sup>42</sup> Using architecture and fashion as his guide, Benjamin traces the way the C19th obsession with casings, coverings and ornamentation virtually entombed

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<sup>40</sup> R. S. Morris, "Class, Sect and Party: The Making of the British Middle Class" in Class (ed) P. Joyce, Oxford University Press, Oxford,, 1995, pp.319-320.

<sup>41</sup> J. Benjamin, op.cit., p.76.

<sup>42</sup> S. Buck-Morss, The Dialectics Of Seeing op.cit., pp.17 and 38.

the individual in a private space, but were gradually opened up to the influences of the modern urban city by Modernism. This progressive dynamic however is coupled with another (regressive) movement in which the flaneur moves into the public space of the city but in the privatised mode of the atomised consumer.<sup>43</sup> Is this not precisely the characteristic of the romantic gaze? Liberated from the private space of the interior, not by Modernism (this is English culture after all) but by the organic community as a commercialised mass spectacle (tourism), the traveller/flaneur practices a disavowal in its privatised withdrawal to the (cultured) individual.

The distinction between the tourist (the collective gaze) and the traveller (the romantic gaze) is played with in a scene early on in the film where Lucy's chaperone, Charlotte is being given a tour of Santa Croce by Miss Lavish, a minor English novelist also staying at the pensione. Miss Lavish is the representative of culture in the new era of Thomas Cook tours. She would "set an examination at Dover and turn back any tourist who could not pass it." She instructs Charlotte and the spectator to admire the rustic authenticity of their surroundings. Her very name suggests excess as she imagines them to be "two lone females lost in the city - what an adventure!" There is a dialogue about the smells of the city which Miss Lavish, having *gone native* - in that highly significant English phrase - encourages Charlotte to breathe in. Charlotte's response, as a tourist, is to produce a handkerchief with which she blocks up her nose from the unpleasant smells, while flourishing the Baedeker she hopes can give her experience of the city the proper mapping and safety she requires. Miss Lavish insists she put it away. Apparently the traveller, Miss Lavish is transgressing her gendered Englishness, exploring not only the dark alleyways of the town, but her desires as she flirts with the "simple peasants".

What is very evident from this scene is how Englishness - both traditional and transgressive versions - are on display, part of the general spectacle made of place. But what is surprising, given the general thrust of the film that traditional Englishness is a facade or performance, is that Miss Lavish too is performing (to Charlotte) the role of the transgressive traveller and is in fact closer to Charlotte's tourist sensibility than she thinks. The difference is that Miss Lavish fixes Italy and the Italians with a desiring

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<sup>43</sup> S. Buck-Morss, *ibid*, pp.32-33 and pp. 293-303.

gaze, which transforms the Other into a site where identity can be rearticulated, played with and extended in fantasised scenarios, but where any genuine cross cultural exchange remains absent. If this ironically undercuts Miss Lavish, (who looks but does not want to get *too* close) it also marks the limit point of the text itself (the book and the film) and the representational terrain it will not cross into.

The truly romantic gaze in this film is gender determined and lies with the Emersons. At the Santa Croce church, Emerson senior disrupts the Reverend Eaeger's explanation of frescos to a group of tourists. Santa Croce was built by faith, according to the Anglican chaplain in Florence, to which Mr Emerson loudly rejoins that that just means "workers weren't paid properly." Ruffled, the Reverend escorts his tourists away. Later, George will impulsively kiss Lucy on a hillside and while she will attempt to forget about the lower middle class Emersons on her return to England, what happened in Italy finally reasserts itself and she leaves her fiancé, her class equal, Cecil Vyse, for George. It is as if the backward and primitive places of travel give English cultural identity a modest shove in the direction of modernity insofar as Lucy and George consummate their cross class romance and break through traditional English class hierarchies. If Italy functions as a mild critique of Englishness, Englishness also triumphantly demonstrates a new synthesis between tradition and modernity through the film's narrative trajectory. In A Room With A View the *mise en scene* demonstrates a flight from the present into a nostalgic past. Andrew Higson has argued that there is a tension within the heritage genre between a nostalgic image with its "reassurance of apparent continuity with the past" and narratives which suggest this past is already in decline.<sup>44</sup> My theoretical model, derived from Benjamin, gives a slightly different tweak to this and emphasises instead not only a tension *within* the nostalgia-decline dynamic but also *between* nostalgia and modernisation. Within the flight back into the past, there is also a forward movement - the prospect of class democracy unfolding within the narrative - a story line which no doubt helped the film's own travels in the American film market.

Of all the films discussed in this chapter, A Room With A View appears to be the most optimistic, the one least committed to sacrifice on the part of

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<sup>44</sup> A. Higson, "Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film" in British Cinema and Thatcherism (ed) L. Friedman, University College Press, London, 1993, p. 128.

its characters, the one in which both desire *and* national identity can be affirmed. Yet if we probe this ideological closure just a little more, we can also extract from it a repressed contradiction. For it is striking that Lucy Honeychurch is a character in the grip of denial and self repression and yet there does not appear to be a single social or institutional relationship which could possibly be the source of her internalised superego. It is significant that Lucy's father is absent, so there is no patriarchal authority to overcome; indeed there is not a two parent family in sight. Cecil's father is also absent as is George's mother. This triangle of dyadic relationships is crucial in allowing the text to position the parent as *reflecting* rather than frustrating their sons and daughters desires. Other potential sources of authority and constraint are no less helpful. The reverend Mr Beebe has, as he puts it, a 'theory' about Lucy , which is that if she starts to live as passionately as she plays Beethoven on piano, things are going to be very interesting. What we have in this film is an image of stifling convention and repression - but without any real institutional underpinnings.

It may be tempting to explain this by reference to postmodernism. As early as 1971 in his book Marxism and Form, Fredric Jameson was diagnosing what he would later call the waning of affect.<sup>45</sup> In a discussion of how impossible the surrealist project of releasing repressed associations becomes once culture has become fully commodified, Jameson argued that the object world of late capitalism is, "utterly without depth: their plastic content is totally incapable of serving as a conductor of psychic energy...All libidinal investment in such objects is precluded from the outset."<sup>46</sup> Certainly A Room With A View seems to have elevated its representation of Englishness to the depthless pastiche (defined by Jameson as parody without its satiric impulse)<sup>47</sup> associated with the postmodern aesthetic. Such images can no more function as a "conductor of psychic energy" than can the marketing that circulates around the export of 'traditional' English commodities such as Jaguar, Rolls-Royce, Laura Ashley, Wedgewood and others which target consumers with their aura of gentrification and which have dominated

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<sup>45</sup> F. Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" in Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Verso, London, 1991, p.10.

<sup>46</sup> F. Jameson, Marxism and Form Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971, p.105.

<sup>47</sup> F. Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" op.cit., p.17.



projections of Britishness within international image markets. 48

There are however both theoretical and empirical problems with this approach. Firstly, it assumes that commodification is a linear process that goes through stages until it is 'complete'. In my discussion of Hollywood's dystopian films in chapter two, I suggested that such a 'stages' theory of history was linear and undialectical. Rather than the process of commodification ever being complete, ever being 'over', it is instead a dynamic in which the fundamental contradictions are both transformed and retained. This is congruent with Benjamin's philosophy of history, that capitalism turns on the dynamic of repetition and novelty. Commodification is never a completed process, because locked into the heart of the commodity form is an antagonism between exchange value and the memory and potential of social and human use values which can never be completely erased whatever the domination of exchange value. From this perspective the term 'postmodernism' refers to a dynamic that is not the chronological supersession of modernity, (the completion of the process of commodification) but rather, as Buck-Morss has argued, a dynamic *within* the long epoch of modernity. 49

In the case of A Room With A View we are also confronted with an empirical problem which perhaps illustrates the theoretical strength of Benjamin as against devotees of postmodernism. For the film is typically British in its faithful adaption of the book by E.M. Forster, published in 1908. Jameson identifies the emergence of postmodernism in the post Second World War period, but Forster's book makes that periodisation rather problematic in this case. Like the film, Forster's book displays the same contradiction: an image of repression but without any sense of depth because its diegesis is without any effective agent of repression.

The way out of this bind is to deploy a term which, to be sure, has been appropriated by postmodernism, but whose historical genesis once more unravels attempts to identify a new epoch. I am thinking of one of the five

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48 A. Elwes, Nations For Sale BMP/DDB Needham, 1994. This is a report by an international advertising agency which suggests that outside a few prestige goods, the gentrified image of Britishness in the international market could be harming exports in other industries such as computer software, media and architecture. The report can be seen as another symptom of the tensions between tradition and modernity in the British self imaginings.

49 S. Buck-Morss, op.cit., p.359.

'faces' of modernity identified by Calinescu, in this case, kitsch. The term kitsch derives from German and became widespread amongst painters and art dealers in Munich in the 1860s and 1870s to designate "cheap art".<sup>50</sup> Historically, kitsch, as a mode of consumption, originates with the new rising bourgeoisie and their attempts to "imitate the old aristocracy and its patterns of consumption"<sup>51</sup> Thus kitsch is a) nostalgic, b) concerned with imitation (or reproduction) and c) involves the popularisation of cultural capital. It is then quintessentially modern.

Forster's novel is also nostalgic for the Victorian bourgeoisie; it imitates the bourgeois thematics of the great nineteenth century novels, particularly the key conflict between a pragmatic materialism in economic matters and romantic idealism in love (the tension captured in the title of Jane Austin's pre-Victorian novel, Sense and Sensibility); yet Forster was also writing at a time when the conditions of a post-Victorian middle class habitus were undergoing change. Mulhern cites a number of factors which disturbed and recomposed the C19th middle class in the early years of the C20th. The decline of the old public schools within an expanding educational system, new educational routes and opportunities for lower middle class children (such as the Emersons), the growth of state employment and the expansion and creation of new areas of cultural production.<sup>52</sup> Thus while the image of the C19th bourgeoisie still held great emotional resonance for the new expanding middle classes, the cultural monopoly of the old Victorians was being eroded, raising acute questions about literary paradigms in the early years of the twentieth century.<sup>53</sup> This tension between modernisation and nostalgia accounts for the book's representation of a classic bourgeois dilemma, but with one half of the desire/repression dynamic substantially weakened.

The selection and cinematic reproduction of this literary text, complete with its kitsch aspirations to be both a popular and 'quality' film, in the 1980s revives this contradiction within a new context: the political contradiction between an investment in neo liberal "modernisation" and a version of the

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<sup>50</sup> M. Calinescu, The Five Faces of Modernity : modernism, avante-garde, decadence, kitsch, postmodernism, Duke University Press, Durham, 1987, p. 234.

<sup>51</sup> M. Calinescu, *ibid*, p.227.

<sup>52</sup> F. Mulhern, The Moment of 'Scrutiny' New Left Books, London, 1979, p.9.

<sup>53</sup> The same dilemma faced Virginia Woolf, but she chose experimentation rather than pastiche. See A. Trodd, A Reader's Guide To Edwardian Literature Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1991, p.4.

traditional Victorian past which marked Thatcherism. Paradoxically, the very affirmative quality of the film's conclusion can be seen as symptomatic of a wider discrepancy between a triumphant individualism and a moral traditionalism whose institutional bases have been hollowed out despite the lip service the New Right continued to pay them.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, A Room With A View may be seen as a very British response to the same set of contradictions (between base and superstructure) being worked through in such Hollywood films as Robo Cop.

### **Shirley Valentine**

The narrative trajectory of the heroine in Shirley Valentine is one which moves geographically and temporally from a divided modernity (M.2) to the more primitive environment of a Greek island where the constraints of modern society can be pushed back and where Shirley recovers an earlier version of herself. The film was made in the late 1980s, after two recessions had sandwiched an unsustainable credit fuelled boom. Tapping into a growing sense of the social and economic failure of the Thatcher revolution, the film is also coterminous with the increasingly popular fantasy in the late 1980s and 1990s, of emigrating from Britain.

In many ways Shirley Valentine deploys a similar set of strategies as Room With A View, now relocated to post-imperial Britain and the working class. Shirley too is trapped, physically and metaphorically, in a room, in this instance, the kitchen. The regime she works under is addicted to the strict division of labour and monotonous routines of the factory and has squeezed all spontaneity from her relationship with her husband. Shirley's existence is rather like her neighbour's dog - the bloodhound who suffers against his nature the vegetarian obsessions of his masters who refuse to feed him meat. Food is a key motif in the film. Shirley's master is her husband, whose regime is symbolised by his "eleventh commandment" that steak - a food long associated with Englishness and masculinity<sup>55</sup> - be served each

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<sup>54</sup> J. Richards identifies individualism and traditionalism as two key components of British national identity but fails to point out how one must logically be in contradiction with the other. This is 'resolved' for Richards by identifying a 'good' traditional individualism associated with Imperial adventures (pp.33-34) and a 'bad' individualism associated with 1960s hedonism and 1980s Thatcherism (pp.23-24). See Films and British National Identity, From Dickens to Dad's Army Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997.

<sup>55</sup> B. Rogers, 'Blood relations' in The Guardian 2 May 27th 1996, pp1-3.

and every Thursday, without fail.

Beck has identified a number of pressures transforming the traditional role of women which are very relevant to Shirley Valentine. Beck notes the social isolation of the housewife as the nuclear family has increased its insular existence and autonomy from class cultures, neighbourhoods and acquaintances. This isolation is reinforced by the increase in life expectancy, so that on average, the end of maternal duties in the mid - 40s opens up questions for women beyond the housewifery which has previously defined them.<sup>56</sup> Such trends are registered in Shirley Valentine Both her children are grown up, although the daughter briefly returns and, infantilising herself, expects Shirley to look after her once more. As we saw in Aliens the fact that Ripley is not Newt's biological mother indicates a wider cultural difficulty in representing motherhood and female independence. Thus as an older women with grown up children, Shirley Valentine is the only central female protagonist to have children in the films discussed in this chapter. Significantly Beck's sociological observations are inscribed into the very form of the film. Shirley's social isolation is built into her direct address to the audience (who else is there for her to talk to?) Furthermore, her experience is hardly unique: "there's a woman three doors down who talks to her microwave" she inform us.

The direct address inevitably conjures up once more the figure of Brecht. We can, as we have seen, trace a fragile Brechtian component in British cinema back to the 1930s. It was revived (weakly, it has to be said) in the 1960s,<sup>57</sup> where the direct address to camera (itself also influenced by the new televisual techniques of the vox pop - see for example, Darling (J. Schlesinger, 1965)) is evident in such films as The Knack (R. Lester, 1965), and Alfie (1965) (directed by Shirley Valentine's Lewis Gilbert). Shirley Valentine is probably the first British film to have a woman address the camera. Yet even Frederic Jameson has argued that the kinds of cultural practice advocated by Brecht and indeed Benjamin, are no longer relevant to "the specific conditions of our time."<sup>58</sup> One way of renewing Brecht's relevance is to paradoxically "de-Brechtianize" the ideas associated with

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<sup>56</sup> U. Beck, Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity Sage, London, 1992, p.110.

<sup>57</sup> A. Lovell, "Brecht In Britain - Lindsay Anderson" in Screen vol.16, no.4, 1975/6.

<sup>58</sup> F. Jameson, "Reification and Utopia In Mass Culture" in Signatures Of The Visible Routledge, London, p.23.

him. For while those ideas were formulated into the specific cultural practice of epic theatre,<sup>59</sup> they can also be situated within a larger context and be seen to be part and parcel of the dynamics of capitalist modernity. Both Giddens and Beck suggest that one of the characteristics of modernity is an increasing self reflexivity, which of course was the central, unifying concept of Brecht's praxis.

For Giddens, the expansion of culture in the broadest sense of the term is a correlate to the way knowledge becomes a force of production under modernity. The expansion of knowledge and culture however produces not certainty, but doubt.<sup>60</sup> The authority of experts is as much called into question as bolstered under "late modernity". Most areas of social activity are open to revision in the light of new information or knowledge. And this is also true of the self which becomes a project, a "reflexively organised endeavour."<sup>61</sup> For Giddens, self identity is fundamentally about reflecting on the continuities and shifts of the individual's biography across time and space. The ability to reflect on and recognise the self requires "the capacity to keep a particular narrative going."<sup>62</sup> The direct to camera address in Shirley Valentine foregrounds this act of narration. It also provides the rationale for a series of flashbacks which show 'home' as a narrative of gradually diminishing horizons, as school and then marriage snuff out the youthful Shirley's aspirations. Before she ever talked to the audience, Shirley confides in us that she talked to the kitchen wall. This is not a sign of madness, as her husband is inclined to think. It is a sign of hope, that she is keeping a narrative of her life going and therefore keeping alive the capacity to change the direction of that narrative at some point in the future and recover a lost aspect of the past.

As with Liz in Billy Liar! (John Schlesinger, 1963) the young Shirley associated travel with freedom and independence and translated these aspirations into the hoped for career of air hostess. Essentially, Shirley Valentine draws on conceptions of the self, of growth and development which are deeply embedded into modernity, while at the same time rejecting the specific institutional forms of modernity (M.2) which frustrate the self.

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<sup>59</sup> W. Benjamin, Understanding Brecht, New Left Books, London, 1977.

<sup>60</sup> A. Giddens, Modernity and Self Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1993, p.21.

<sup>61</sup> A. Giddens, *ibid*, p.5.

<sup>62</sup> A. Giddens, *ibid*, p.54.

The specific institutional form which it is concerned with is of course the family. The film neatly reverses the assumption of many British films in the 1960s which figured growing up and marriage as an emasculating trap for the young male hero.<sup>63</sup> Shirley's husband, Joe, could be Arthur Seaton in Saturday Night Sunday Morning (Karel Reisz, 1960) - only now, 20 years down the line, and in the context of a visibly decaying Britain, he has let "the bastards" grind him down, and he in turn grinds Shirley down. In contrast to the now spent force of the Angry Young Man, it is through Shirley and her search for 'the good life' which constitutes the focal point of the narrative.

As with A Room With A View, the film attempts to make a distinction between the figure of the tourist (the collective gaze of Shirley's fellow English holidaymakers with their post-Imperial racism) and the traveller, whose journey to some other place relativizes rather than reinforces home. Thus on arrival to the resort, the tourists instantly start to moan as they overlook the hotel. At this point the camera is merely looking at them looking at the offscreen object of their disaffection. The text then constructs a shot-reverse-shot between Shirley and the resort with her voice over telling us that it looks "like paradise". It is precisely at this moment that the text begins the process of carefully demarcating Shirley's gaze from the others, of privatising the collective desires which make the tourist travel. Yet via Shirley, the romantic gaze which the film turns on Greece is clearly the gaze of the tourist evident for example is the casting of Tom Conti as Shirley's island lover. If the touristic gaze is hard to transcend for films which send their characters on holiday abroad, might the exchange with the Other achieve a more complex representation if it is the Other who does the visiting?

### **War and the Stranger**

We have seen via Marcuse's reading of Freud, that the formation of communities involves the "generation of libidinous ties" <sup>64</sup> and simultaneously, the drawing of boundaries and prohibitions. Separation, division, the drawing of boundaries, renunciation: there can be few more

<sup>63</sup> J. Hill, "Working-class Realism and Sexual Reaction: Some Theses on the British 'New Wave'." in British Cinema History (eds) J. Curran and V. Porter, pp.303-311.

<sup>64</sup> H. Marcuse, 5 Lectures op.cit., p.19.

potent examples of this than the formation of national identity vis-a-vis its external others, at least in its dominant conceptions. Here national borders are, as Avtar Brah notes,

“simultaneously social, cultural and psychic territories to be patrolled against those whom they construct as outsiders, aliens, the Others; forms of demarcation where the very act of prohibition inscribes transgression.”<sup>65</sup>

I want to draw on a conceptual motif deployed by Zygmunt Bauman in order to critique the homogenising dynamic of this imagined community. Bauman's position as a liberal means that most of his ire is directed at the role of the state in institutionalising a compulsive standardisation which he recognises as one dynamic of modernity and which manifests itself in the nation state's attempt to fix meaning and identity around a homogeneous 'us' distinct from equally homogeneous Others. For Bauman, the figure of the stranger represents that other dynamic of modernity: coming into contact with difference. Rather less visible to Bauman is the investments capitalism has in standardisation *and* differentiation, in nation-states (to protect its interests) and international trade (to expand its markets). With this caveat in mind though, I think Bauman's concept of the stranger is very useful in the study of travel narratives.

Bauman notes how the process of nation-building required a bid for linguistic, cultural and ideological unification of the population. The state's legitimacy rested on perpetual “reference to shared history, common spirit and a unique and exclusive way of life.”<sup>66</sup> In a world of increasing geographical mobility, the stranger undermines the binary opposition between friends and enemies, insiders and outsiders, good and evil, right and wrong.<sup>67</sup> The Second World War is a historical moment in which mobility and contact with Others intensifies even as the boundary between friends and enemies is drawn more firmly in an attempt to unify 'us' and demonise 'them'. The Second World War remains an enduringly popular moment of representation for British film culture. Both Yanks (white

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<sup>65</sup> A. Brah, cartographies of diaspora op.cit, p.198.

<sup>66</sup> Z. Bauman, “Modernity and Ambivalence” in Global Culture, Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity (ed) M. Featherstone, Sage, London, 1990, p.160.

<sup>67</sup> Z. Bauman, *ibid*, pp.143-144.

American soldiers in a small English village) and Another Time, Another Place (three Italian prisoners of war in the north of Scotland) mobilise the figure of the stranger as someone who confounds the friend/foe demarcations. If travel relativises identity in A Room With A View and Shirley Valentine, it is the Other as traveller who undermines what had once seemed natural and taken for granted. The stranger's "unredeemable sin" is to blur "a boundary line vital to the construction of a particular social order."<sup>68</sup> The constellation between the Second World War and the 1980s works not only at the level of globalisation and mobility and the opening up of an insular society, but also, particularly, the gendered social order. For on the Home Front, the Second World War saw, if only temporarily, new roles, social contributions and identities for women at the point of production.

The link between new social roles and the expansion of desire for women is made clear in the opening of Yanks where a group of women stand in front of propaganda posters welcoming their sex into the factories even as the American trucks are bringing in a fresh load of soldiers. A group of older men comment, "makes you wonder what women see in them." The presence of Americans cuts across the couplets of tradition/modernity and realism/fantasy, since they are surrogate representatives of Hollywood and its utopia of self determination and wish fulfilment. In Yanks the arrival of Matt forces Jean to question her traditional horizons, delimited as they are by her working in the family shop and her relationship with Ken, whom she has known since childhood. Via Matt, America is associated with expanding one's horizons. After the war, Matt plans to take advantage of increasing physical mobility by moving on from his own family's diner and opening up a motel. Within the film Jean's mother remains a continual point of opposition to Matt's presence and the effect he is having on Jean.

In Another Time, Another Place, the film mobilises the trope of the Italians as reluctant fighters, (one that was deployed by the Italian film Mediterraneo (Gabriele Salvatores, 1991)), in order to posit strangers who are not quite friends and not quite enemies. For example, Paolo, Umberto and Luigi celebrate the end of the war in Europe far more excitedly than the Scottish natives. The definition of the Italians as enemies is most evident around the character of Jess whose husband has died overseas. She refuses

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<sup>68</sup> Z. Bauman, *ibid*, pp.150-151.



to work in the fields with the prisoners and she reminds Janie of the price paid by women in occupied France for getting too close to the enemy. But Janey, stuck in a loveless and childless marriage with Dougal, does get too close. As she and Luigi make love, the icons of his domicile adorn the wall they are pressed up against: the Catholic crucifix (both familiar and different), a photograph of his stern Mother (distant and yet close) and a picture of the Madonna with a child, whose tanned brown face one of the Scottish women describes, questioningly, as 'black'. As Bauman notes, "[t]he Stranger disturbs the resonance between physical and psychical distance." <sup>69</sup>

### **Fantasy and the Stranger**

Because the stranger cannot be clearly demarcated as an enemy, they do not invoke fear; but because they are not entirely familiar, they can trigger fantasy and desire. A Letter To Brezhnev is a film made during another kind of war, the Cold War of the Reagan and Thatcher era. Yet the very bellicosity of these political leaders produced a resurgence of the peace movement, principally organised around the Campaign For Nuclear Disarmament, in which women had particularly high profiles, most notably around the Greenham Common occupation. It was this burgeoning anti-militaristic politics which A Letter To Brezhnev taps into with its story of a working class women from Kirby falling in love with a Russian sailor. Elaine is marked out from the start as a women looking for romance, dreaming of exotic locations such as Casablanca and professing herself to be tired of the local men who have no romance. It is Elaine's gaze that picks Peter out at the disco, a gaze heavily marked by fantasy and romantic longing, as the sound shifts from diegetic to the non-diegetic theme tune of the film and Peter is caught in the flashing lights from the dance floor. Interestingly, he looks back directly into the camera, marking him as the object of *her* gaze, while the first reverse shot of Elaine is positioned at the conventional forty-five degree angle. Yet while this identifies Elaine as desiring, the film overall, as we shall see, locates the fulfilment of those desires outside herself and as realisable only through the (male) other.

Such fantasies and desires brings the 'native' to a point of crisis with their own social order. The fantasy sequence in Another Time, Another Place is

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<sup>69</sup> Z. Bauman, *ibid*, p.150.

interesting precisely because it poses a complex relationship between realism and fantasy, between the performance principle and the pleasure principle. This can perhaps best be illustrated by relating the film's representation of the organic community to O.C.1 and O.C.2. At times the representation of the organic community is located at O.C.2: under the exigencies of war, the performance principle has pushed Janie out into the fields, harvesting the corn, planting the potatoes, working at the threshing mill. Only the Italians' occasional antics (starting a potato fight for example) disrupt this economic performance principle. Just as the landscape is photographed in a way which alternatively brings out its harsh unforgiving nature but also its beauty, so the organic community overall is ambivalent.

Janie's fantasy is triggered through labour while she is milking a cow. Here pleasure and desire appear to be interwoven into the fabric of the community as Janie works the cow's teats, producing the milk (reminders of her untapped fecundity), pressed up against the flanks of the animal. It is hard to think of an image that more strongly conjures up Marcuse's notion of a pre-Oedipal "maternal" relation between the embryonic ego and the mother's body, where "the primary experience of reality is that of a libidinous union."<sup>70</sup> It is through sensuous labour that the pleasure principle is manifested. Yet it is the presence of difference in the form of the male strangers (Janie overhears the Italians/strangers talking in the yard) which transforms this connection to nature into the kind of liminal zone (O.C.1) which liberates Lucy Honeychurch and Shirley Valentine.

However, Janie's fantasy is no simple wish fulfilment but is laced with guilty anxiety. Janie has two fantasy images where desire and guilt, wish fulfilment and anxiety, the pleasure and the reality principles, clash. Firstly she imagines herself naked in front of Luigi, Umberto and Paolo. Then she imagines herself naked and being introduced by Luigi to the other Italian prisoners held at the camp, who she met at Christmas. This scene was used in the marketing and publicity material around the film, its surreal quality truly suggesting another time and another place. The image however, of a single naked woman in front of a group of men, is inevitably marked by ambivalence, the desire mixed with condemnation: has she become a whore, who else knows about her relationship with Luigi, is he even now bragging

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<sup>70</sup> H. Marcuse, *ibid*, p. 230

to his friends? In the next shot/scene we see Janie demanding Luigi's silence.

As we have seen in relation to personal identity, drawing boundaries between self and other is an inevitable process in the formation of the self. The political question which in different ways Jessica Benjamin and Bauman are asking, is what are the consequences of the kind of boundaries which construct a binary opposition between self and Other, a polarity? One of the consequences is that such a boundary fixes individual and national identity and rules out any alternatives except as transgression and fantasy. In narratives of heterosexual romance between the stranger and the native, the ambivalence of the stranger and the sexual reciprocation of the woman provokes the social order into reasserting its values and assumptions by trying to firmly redraw the line that separates them and us, insiders and outsiders, friends and enemies, the possible and the desirable, reality and fantasy. In A Letter To Brezhnev, the film builds towards its *denouement* by having Elaine negotiate a series of attempts by different people to call into question the political and geographical boundaries she intends to cross by travelling to the Soviet Union. The most serious of these is an attempt by the Foreign Office to dissuade her from going by telling her that Peter is already married. This provides the film with the opportunity to make some acute observations on how the border between them and us drives people to attack the miserable existence of the Other while not noticing the poverty of their own lives.

However, as far as the question of gender is concerned, there is something ironic in the image of men proving to be the catalyst to changes in women's lives. Bauman's concept of the stranger owes much to Derrida's theory of the 'undecidables'. A concept such as 'supplement' hovers between being something essential required to fill a perceived lack and something that is inessential, a mere appendage which the main body stands free from. Such undecidables undermine the binary oppositions and demarcations of Western metaphysics, Derrida argued. It has also been a fruitful concept for Feminism and its critique of a phallogentric language. Kristeva for example has argued that the 'feminine' has a similar status as the supplement:

"The feminine is at once constructed within the symbolic order, like

any gender, and yet is relegated to its margins, judged inferior to masculine power. The woman is both “inside” and “outside” male society,,,This is why she troubles the neat categories of such a regime, blurring its well-defined boundaries.” <sup>71</sup>

In these films however, it is men who are crossing borders and undoing “neat categories”, it is the men who are both on the margins and yet simultaneously central to the lives of the women they touch; it is in desiring men that the binary opposition between reality and fantasy is undone. The men in these films enter the world of the female characters but have an independent existence from it, as soldiers or sailors, just as in fact men have historically crossed the work/home demarcations. They are not fundamentally changed by their new surroundings as Lucy Honeychurch or Shirley Valentine is. The stranger or the native exhibits a predisposed sensitivity to the female character’s lack of happiness. Thus while these films open up the question of female desire, they are not figured as the agents of modernity even though for example the Second World War is a period of turbulence and change in gendered identities. These films register changing expectations and possibilities for women, but they do so in a way that makes the real agent of change, the real subverters of the status quo, the men.

### **Pairs and Couples**

This critique can be developed by looking at the narrative strategy whereby the main romantic couple is paralleled and distinguished from another couple who are friends or acquaintances with the main romantic leads. In Yanks Daniel and Molly play second fiddle to Jean and Matt’s story, while in A Letter To Brezhnev, Theresa and Sergei are the second couple to Elaine and Peter.

The choice of narrative focalisation in Yanks is clearly significant ideologically. For the war has not had as profound an impact on Jean as it has on Molly. While Jean continues to work in her parents store, Molly represents some of the changing gender roles which the war has initiated,

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<sup>71</sup> B. D. Palmer, Descent Into Discourse, The Reification Of Language and the Writing of Social History Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1990, p.154.

with her movement into a traditionally male job, that of a bus conductor. It is in this job that she first meets Daniel and Matt. She is presented as confident in her role and has a corresponding sexual forwardness as she flirts with Daniel and then invites Daniel and Matt for a date with her and Jean. In many ways she is the more interesting character, but the issues opened up by her character are largely marginalised by the narrative focus on Jean and Matt. The fact that she has not entered one of the occupations previously the monopoly of men helps the film to not exactly close down the question of female desire, but align it very tightly to Matt; it helps reinforce that this is a narrative whereby Jean moves from Ken to Matt.

Similarly, Lucy moves from Cecil to George (A Room With A View) and Janie from Dougal to Luigi (Another Time, Another Place). Luigi's ability to show his emotions contrasts with Dougal's emotional and sexual repressions. Again this distinction is tapping into the debates about the 'New Man'. Luigi would appear to be a prime example of "crying [as] the new ejaculation" as one writer sceptically noted of New Man's emotional honesty.<sup>72</sup>

Shirley Valentine appears to be utilising the same strategy as Shirley moves from Joe to Costas, but unexpectedly takes an interesting detour. When Shirley refuses to return home but instead returns to Costas' restaurant, she finds out that his apparent attunement to her desires is merely part of the seduction technique he is already repeating to a new women. Yet she has not returned to *him*, but rather seeks a livelihood in his restaurant. This opens up the narrative space for Joe who now telephones Shirley asking her to return. When she makes it clear that she will not, Joe visits her. The film ends with Shirley transformed (Joe does not recognise her) sitting by the sea and pouring Joe a glass of wine. She is neither with Costas or Joe, the future is unpredictable but she has found in her working life a source of satisfaction. As an ending this film is atypical in its refusal to insist on resignation or to punish the heroine or to insist that heterosexual romance is the be all and end all of happiness. Unlike A Room With A View it has been unable to reconcile this within the British imaginary. The liminal zone of this more natural place has not been incorporated into a modernisation project precisely because Shirley, unlike Lucy Honeychurch, does *not* go back home and so the Greek island persists

<sup>72</sup> C. Landesman, The Guardian 2, June 20th, 1990, p.17.

as a kind of negation.

The other films however, all have a much stronger investment in a particular heterosexual narrative economy identified by Luce Irigaray's notion of a disavowed "homosexual economy".

"The exchanges upon which patriarchal societies are based take place exclusively among men. Women, signs, commodities, and currency always pass from one man to another...There is a price to pay for being agents of exchange: male subjects have to give up the possibility of serving as commodities themselves. Thus all economic organisation is homosexual. That of desire as well, even desire for women. Women exists only as an occasion for mediation, transaction, transition, transference, between man and his fellow man, indeed between man and himself." <sup>73</sup>

While this formulation does risk voiding heterosexual women of any sense of choice and self reflection about their sexual desires and choices, it is easy to see a certain obsessive pattern in the narrative armature of much popular cinema. Consider the scene in Yanks where Matt is talking about *his* plans for the future, after the war. The film resorts to a highly old fashioned, classical mode of soft focus photography and lighting on Jean's rapt expression to underline her changing feelings about Matt and her life in the village. What is problematic here is how one-way everything is. He transforms her, while Jean's only effect on him is as prized object to be pursued and won. This conforms absolutely to Jessica Benjamin's critique that "women seek their desire in men, hoping to have it be recognised through the agency of an other." <sup>74</sup> Thus in the narrative trajectory of the film, from O.C.2 to M.1, a very particular version of the future and of 'modernisation' is being offered (one which does not unduly trouble established gender relations) and this is reinforced by the focus on Jean at the expense of Molly. As with A Room With A View's Victorian setting, locating a restricted modernity in the past provides for a certain kind of ideological closure, that of evolutionary progress, which Benjamin had been so concerned to critique.

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted in B. D. Palmer, Descent into Discourse op.cit., pp.176-177.

<sup>74</sup> J. Benjamin, The Bonds Of Love, op.cit., p.91.

What though is the role of the secondary female character, what is her narrative function? Both Molly and Theresa, her narrative counterpart on A Letter To Brezhnev function as 'good time' girls, whose role is to push the reluctant, less forward or cautious female lead into situations they would not otherwise have entered into. Thus it is Theresa who steals the wallet of a man who tries to buy a dance, so funding their night out (Elaine is unemployed) and it is Theresa who introduces herself to Peter and Sergei after Elaine has spotted them. Later, in the disco's toilets, it is Elaine who wonders if the Russians might be "a bit strange" and it is Theresa who encourages her to grasp her romantic dreams, asking "what's wrong with a bit of strange..."

One of the ideological consequences of a narrative economy structured around the passage a woman makes between one man and another, is that it drives a wedge between the female pair. The possibilities of friendship and solidarity around their shared experiences are foreclosed by this narrative structure and the emphasis which the films place on distinguishing *between* the couples and/or between women. Another Time, Another Place does not use the couple structure but the isolation of the community depicted is redoubled by the isolation of Janie from other women within the community. There are two significant figures here, Else and Jess. Elsie, the younger woman, appears to be somewhat simple but she is also the subject of gossip amongst the local community concerning her relationships with men. Thus she functions as a warning to Janie (and indeed the text itself punishes her by making her the victim of a rape by an Italian soldier). Then there is Jess, the older woman who lives in an isolated part of an already isolated community. But Janie's relationship to her appears to be cut off by Jess's hostility to the Italian prisoners of war. Yet, strangely, at the end of the film, when Luigi has left the community, Janie travels to Jess's house bearing a message once more from Finley, the landowner, asking if she will now return to work in the fields. Breaking down, Janie confesses to her relationship with Luigi. Surprisingly, Jess seems neither shocked nor angry but suggests that she had better come inside the house. The film ends with Janie crying outside, on the threshold of entering, but standing still; Jess is offscreen as she has been for most of the film, but this gesture towards female solidarity also remains outside the film's field of representation as it fades to black on Janie's tearful face.

Now, I am not saying that films should provide 'positive' representations of female solidarity, rather I am suggesting that there are some symptomatic absences or excesses to ensure that they do not. But contrast this with Shirley Valentine. Here it is Jane who to some extent has the role of the 'good time' friend (she encourages Shirley to take the holiday which Jane has won, in the first place). However Jane's main function in the film is not as friend but as a vehicle for some acutely made observations on the gap between the theory of female solidarity and the actual (Oedipal) practice within middle class feminism. Thus Jane promptly abandons Shirley on the holiday for a man she meets on the plane.

In other films however, there is a tension within the narration between an acknowledged and genuine friendship between women and a narrative economy in which women are a means of exchange between men. This tension is illustrated in A Letter To Brezhnev when Elaine is picking out Peter with her romantic, desiring gaze. The text makes sure that at this moment Elaine and Theresa are separated, the latter is in the toilets transforming herself from factory worker into a glamorous figure. One can sense that distinction between the romantic and the collective gaze underpinning the characters of Elaine and Theresa respectively, even though they are not on holiday. The fact that Theresa is 'doing herself up' in the mirror captures that element of narcissism which the romantic gaze finds in the collective gaze and which is evident in the way that the latter has little investment in an 'authentic' engagement with difference, but, from the point of view of the romantic gaze, must have it carefully packaged, 'done up' like Theresa and its expectations made safe.

Nevertheless, Theresa is given more shading than Molly in Yanks. In the hotel rooms which Theresa has paid for with her stolen money, she confesses to Elaine that her leisure/pleasure time is compensation for her unfulfilling job which involves stuffing her hand up the arses of chickens all day. Theresa is shown to have fantasies and desires that bring her into conflict with the social order. She tells Sergei that in her imaginary job she gets to travel extensively, even to the moon. Sergei however cannot respond to this fantasy, cannot help transform it into some reality, precisely because he cannot understand English. And without the male character being



receptive to the female character's desires, women are represented as unable to realise their potential. Thus Theresa and Sergei can connect only physically, sexually. The relationship between Elaine and Peter however is distinguished, marked out as special, precisely by the fact that they do not have sex, but spend all night talking. On the surface the stranger appears to open up what Jessica Benjamin called an intersubjective space, particularly when the contrast is made between the sensitive stranger and his more orthodoxly masculine friend (in Yanks Daniel is a boxer which contrasts with the more 'sensitive' reminised masculinity of Matt) - but the appearance conceals some familiar Oedipal relations.

A Letter To Brezhnev is interesting insofar as it gives greater scope to the relationship between the female pair than any of the other films discussed, and in some ways the film is a British anticipation of Thelma and Louise (Ridley Scott, 1991). The opening scenes of Theresa and Elaine on the run may have veered off into another narrative, if there were any wide open spaces for them to have escaped into. As it is they run into Peter and Sergei. Yet the absence of Peter from the second half of the film, gives greater scope for the female relationship to stay in the foreground to some extent and the final scene is set at the airport, the moment of their separation. Poignant as it maybe, Theresa's recognition of her inability to transcend her social determinations merely confirms the dependence of women on men. This dependence drives the wedge of heterosexual love between female friendship, but it also does more. What is problematic about the film is not Elaine's 'conventional' trajectory (even down to the fact that her love for Peter is unconsummated), but that the film insists that the special and unique quality of the Peter/Elaine relationship has to be affirmed by making Theresa's life so helpless and empty, her leisure/(sexual)pleasure time a vacuous compensation for her degraded conditions of labour which she is presented as being powerless to do anything about. The different narrative trajectories of the two women is reproduced in the way the film welds together two disparate forms, a 'realism' which asserts the given solidity of the world (eg the exterior location shooting in Liverpool) and a romantic love story (complete with a fairy tale star twinkling in the sky) which offers a utopian exit out of that world.

## Conclusion

Via the two Benjamins (Walter and Jessica) I have tried to link the historical and psychical past in my analysis of popular culture. For Walter, the dynamic of novelty and innovation in commodity relations constitutes modernity as a series of ruptures which makes the immediate past unusable. Utopian wish fulfilment is therefore lodged in the distant past which must be activated for the present. But, just as in the psychical domain where wish fulfilment has to negotiate the performance principle, so conjuring with images from the historical past requires a delicate negotiation with commodity relations. In particular for Benjamin, what was to be avoided at all costs was the slotting of the past into a continuum whereby history takes its linear course. History in this form comes to us badly contaminated or fetishised: the eternal repetition where nothing really changes flows beneath the ruptures of modernity (the commodity as novelty). I suggested that A Room With A View and Yanks are most in need of a critical rescue from this project of modernisation without change. Another Time, Another Place opts for different strategy. Here modernisation is a temporary, largely unwanted and hardly liberating incursion of the outside world on an isolated community, which will return to 'normal' once that incursion recedes. The stifling quality of that normality is recognised and the film has some investment in the stranger (Luigi) if not in modernity, a traveller from an exotic version of the same kind of agrarian/petty bourgeois culture. The film remains suspended between a rejection of the changes brought about by the outside world and the inadequacies within the community. (This position is almost exactly replayed in another European film by Radford, Il Postino (1994)).

The other problem with returns to the past is the question of what happens to the collective identities of the present? In my discussion of the romantic gaze I tried to suggest how the utopian potential of a more 'natural' past is drawn into a privatised, individual space (very evident again in A Room With A View) and one which operates at the expense of exploring a female collectivity ( Yanks, Another Time, Another Place, Letter To Brezhnev) or class collectivity (the above, plus Shirley Valentine) It is at this point that historical consciousness and psychical dynamics connect up. The other Benjamin (Jessica) shows us how this individualism ties into the Oedipal

model.

For Jessica, the Oedipal trajectory transforms our connectedness with the world, with others, into relations of a dominant 'I' or subject and a dominated object. Our first experience of domination and subordination crystallise around gender. Benjamin too returns to the past, the individual's past. She crosses the borders and boundaries which the Oedipal trajectory institutes in order to open up a theoretical and political space prior to the subject's "conquest" (Marcuse) by the reality principle. In this pre-Oedipal space, Benjamin detects an intersubjective relation where the embryonic subject explores its emerging self through the interface with another subject whose sovereignty is also becoming (painfully) apparent.

The narratives of the films discussed figure a similar strategy in the narrative journeys in which either the women travel to some more primitive place where the Oedipal relations of home are called into question or the arrival of the male stranger opens up an apparently intersubjective space. However, some familiarly Oedipal dynamics are still at work as we discovered. In these narratives women are the emblems of change. But the men do not change, their identities, whether orthodox masculine or sensitive 'new man' are given. Thus the major historical reality which makes women emblems of change, the long term and accumulating impact on men of women's growing presence in the labour force, suffers a massive repression. The sensitive man, already attuned to female desire, is already, painlessly in place and therefore does not have to undergo any self questioning. That is all done by the women leaving them in a familiar position of subordination and calling into question the extent to which things have really changed. These films register to varying degrees movement across some of the established borders and boundaries of gendered identities, but they all also show both the Oedipal resistance to and the difficulty in travelling very far.

# **Diasporic Travels**

"It's impossible for a white person to believe in capitalism and not believe in racism. You can't have capitalism without racism...<sup>1</sup> I believe that there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice and equality for everyone and those who want to continue the systems of exploitation. I believe that there will be that kind of clash, but I don't think it will be based upon the colour of the skin. " Malcolm X. <sup>2</sup>

This thesis has sought to interrogate Britishness within a particular understanding of spatial and temporal co-ordinates. I have been exploring the meaning of Britishness as it has been defined by its relations with *other* geo-cultural terrains (America and Europe). These spatial determinants on British identity and film culture have then been mapped over a temporal dynamic in which the tensions between the claims of modernity and tradition (the organic community) are played out. The concept of diaspora, articulates with this methodology very well.

My spatial triangulation of national identity (caught within a forcefield whose points are America, Europe and Britain's Imperial legacy) means that Britishness is never an internally generated endogenous 'thing'; it always has exogenous dynamics. "It is above all the external determinants which have been most vital" argues Bill Schwarz in relation to 'race', ethnicity and imperialism. "'England alone' is a myth: potent, but false." <sup>3</sup> Even those regressive, mythical versions of identity which are premised on racial and ethnic homogeneity and exclusivity, require a border between itself and those *against* which it is defined. More progressive versions of belonging (Bauman's work for example) see this border as permeable, so that what is exogenous becomes endogenous and vice-versa.

Benjamin for example wrote about the *porous* social space that characterises Naples, particularly the way it breaks down the division between public and private space. Benjamin was fully aware that the *content* of this social space was dominated by the reactionary influences of the *camorra* and Catholicism, both of which crossed the public/private demarcations of modern life (e.g. the favour, the confession) for their own purposes. But what intrigued him was the pre-modern *form* of living which in a conceptual constellation, Benjamin redeemed as anticipating some future social order.

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<sup>1</sup> M. X, Malcolm X Speaks (ed) G. Brietman, Grove Weidenfeld, 1965, New York, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> M. X, *ibid*, p.216.

<sup>3</sup> B. Schwarz, "Introduction" in The Expansion of England, Race, ethnicity and cultural history (ed) B. Schwarz, Routledge, London, 1996, p.1.

What attracted Benjamin the revolutionary to the porosity of this social space, is that it implied a “passion for improvisation”, avoiding the “stamp of the definitive”. “No situation”, he wrote, “appears intended forever, no figure asserts its “thus and not otherwise.”<sup>4</sup> Benjamin’s emphasis on the transitional nature of this social space anticipates contemporary cultural theory’s interest in the improvisational and shifting nature of identity, national or otherwise. Methods informed by a particular theorisation of diaspora, question whether, as Gilroy puts it, “cultures always flow into patterns congruent with the borders of essentially homogeneous nation states.”<sup>5</sup> Gilroy wants to develop a “transnational and intercultural perspective”<sup>6</sup> on Black culture and politics and quadrangulates Black identity between America, Britain, the Caribbean and Africa (the four points of the Atlantic slave trade).

If the concept of diaspora can be defined by a strong spatial dimension which transcends the boundaries of the nation state, it also has a temporal dimension. The dialectic between tradition and modernity which I have been exploring in relation to white ethnicities via the organic community/modernity couplet, has strong affinities with the question which the concept of diaspora proposes about cultural traditions, about how the present uses and views the past. In particular, I have argued that there are two contradictory conceptions of time within capitalist modernity. On the one hand there is the conception of the tabula rasa which derives from the ruptures and transformations which characterises the modern epoch. On the other hand there is an organic evolutionary conception which links past and present in an unbroken continuum. This conception of time, apparently antithetical to the first actually derives from it; modernity begets its opposite, tradition, to ground that which is constantly liquefying its own foundations.

A similar tension, between tradition and modernity, continuity and change, cultural pasts and cultural futures, is to be found within the theoretical articulation and cinematic representation of diaspora. In both theory and cultural practice, we shall see that the predominant emphasis around diasporic identities is to stress change, novelty and rupture rather than the

<sup>4</sup> W. Benjamin and A. Lacis, “Naples” from *One Way Street* NLB, London, 1979, 169-170.

<sup>5</sup> P. Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic, Modernity and Double Consciousness* Verso, London, 1993, p.5.

<sup>6</sup> P. Gilroy, *ibid*, p.15.

strong emphasis on continuity, on returning to the past, which was evident in the chapters on genealogical and gendered travels. This difference has two major sources. Firstly, it may be seen as a response to the dominant mode of imagining the nation in ethnocentric terms with mythical roots reaching into an ancient past. It is difficult for the 'newly arrived' to be reconciled with the exclusivity which such dominant imagining of the community implies. Secondly, there is a generational factor that needs to be taken into account. While the newly arrived may negotiate the dominant conception of national belonging which the 'host' community have, by retaining strong attachments to *their* national origins, their cultural traditions, this is less of an option for subsequent generations. For them, Africa, the Caribbean and Asia are more remote and therefore they may feel more keenly the need to interrogate notions of belonging which *both* their parents and the dominant culture have.

However, such an interrogation also requires a particular set of theoretical resources and here the influence of post-structuralism and postmodernism as well as Feminism and Marxism, become crucial. Theorising diasporic identities has been undertaken by writers from a diverse range of positions and cultural and national backgrounds but the two films I have selected to illuminate these issues are both British Asian films which help move the analysis into the 1990s: Wild West (David Attwood, 1992) and Bhaji On The Beach (Gurinder Chadha, 1993). I have also selected them because the impact of Asian post-migration identity on mainstream popular culture and academic studies, has only recently started to attract the kind of sustained attention which the Afro-Caribbean diaspora has produced.<sup>7</sup>

In the previous chapter I attempted to articulate the category of gender with a historical materialist analysis and in this chapter I hope to do the same with regard to 'race' and ethnicity. In the tradition of other writers, I place 'race' in inverted commas to indicate that it has no scientific, genetic validity. It is a historical construct. I use the term Black to mean a political construct, a site of solidarity against white supremacism. By ethnicity I refer to the *particular* cultural identities that may be assembled within the category of Black or, more commonly in the 1990s, *against* its potentially homogenising effacement of cultural difference. The tensions

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<sup>7</sup> M. Gillespie, Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change Comedia/Routledge, London, 1995, pp.5-6.

between the particular and the general, unity and difference, are a key theme in this chapter. While engaging with questions of 'race', ethnicity and cultural identity I offer a critique of some of the ways they have been formulated and theorised. In particular, I work towards a rearticulation of some of these concepts with two concepts enduringly important to the Marxist lexicon: class and consciousness. The focus on class continues the theme of the globalisation of commodity relations which I have explored in previous chapters. While Walter Benjamin's concept of porosity and the transitory and improvisational nature of meaning and identity anticipates concerns close to the heart of contemporary cultural theory, Benjamin's concept of the collective unconscious seems strikingly unfashionable and difficult to reconcile with the themes of plurality and difference which dominate cultural theory today. I will address this via a critique of the way consciousness has been all but collapsed into the notion of identity. This has meant that the possibilities for connecting with a world beyond one's *particular* identity, connecting crucially on the basis of class interests (the collective unconscious) have been squeezed out of cultural theory.

### **Theorising Diaspora**

A diaspora is quite different from the temporary modes of travel connected with holidays or work which underpinned the gendered travels of the previous chapter. Diasporas (derived from the term 'dispersion')<sup>8</sup> "emerge out of migrations of collectivities" usually associated with social, political and/or economic upheaval.<sup>9</sup> These collectivities are, as Brah notes, internally differentiated in terms of class, gender and generation - all important differentials and potential divisions within the films I will be discussing. The concept of diaspora can be defined in radically different ways, either in relation to an "ontological essentialist view" of identity or a libertarian, pluralistic, hybrid identity.<sup>10</sup> Black and Asian cultural producers have been well aware of the tensions between these competing definitions of diaspora<sup>11</sup> and both films register the contesting interpretations of identity which they offer. Essentially, in both films the contesting interpretations are associated with a generational split, with the

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<sup>8</sup> A. Brah, cartographies of diaspora, contesting identities Routledge, London, 1996, p.181.

<sup>9</sup> A. Brah, *ibid*, p. 193.

<sup>10</sup> P. Gilroy, *op.cit.*, p.32.

<sup>11</sup> See for example the interview with Black Audio Collective in Framework 35, 1988, pp.11-12.



older generation most likely to strongly articulate the ontological essentialist view and the younger generation most likely to be the articulators of the hybrid view. (This is reversed in My Son The Fanatic (Udayan Prasad, 1997), based on a short story by Hanif Kureshi).

In the ontological essentialist position the diaspora is viewed as a kind of Fall, a weakening of identity, a negative condition, a decline from an original unified home and subsequent inability to fit in and be accepted elsewhere. It is an in-between-condition that is viewed as unproductively troubling and peculiar to the historical experience of a violent uprooting. The coercive conditions of that uprooting for Black Africa for example, is then projected through out all subsequent history so that the Black subject cannot be seen to make anything productive out of circumstances that were not of their choosing. Politically, this position is associated with Black separatism and returns to Africa and are somewhat rare within academic discourses. Cinematic examples of this position are also rare but Welcome II The Terrordome (Ngozi Onwurah, 1993, UK) would be one example, a film that attempts to conceal its profound conservatism, on gender as well as 'race', by attempting to appropriate Malcolm X to its politics. <sup>12</sup>

In the other conceptualisation, whatever the original coercive circumstances for the dispersion, the identities which are subsequently forged are seen more positively as a creative adaption and syncretism. <sup>13</sup> In contradistinction to the desire for identity as fixed and timeless essence, this version of diaspora becomes emblematic of the claim "that identity is always plural, and in process". <sup>14</sup> Diaspora in this conceptualisation is quintessentially typical of the epoch. "The chronicles of diasporas" argues Iain Chambers, "-those of the black Atlantic, of metropolitan Jewry, or mass rural displacement - constitute the groundswell of modernity." <sup>15</sup> As Gillespie notes, the conceptualisation of diaspora will have very different uses and politics depending on whether it tracks cultural routes or searches for cultural roots. <sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Gilroy rightly savaged the film in Sight and Sound vol.5, no.2, 1995, pp.18-19.

<sup>13</sup> P. Gilroy, There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack Routledge, London, 1987, pp.153-222.

<sup>14</sup> A. Brah, op.cit., p.197.

<sup>15</sup> I. Chambers, migrancy, culture, identity Routledge/Comedia, London, 1994, p.16.

<sup>16</sup> M. Gillespie, op.cit., p.7.

The neo-liberal emphasis on identity as an ongoing shifting process has made a calculated attempt to rigorously distinguish itself from the ontological essentialist position. However, in doing so, it risks abolishing any sense of continuity and any sense of the past as a coherent, knowable resource. Here the conceptualisation of diaspora merges with the postmodernist insistence that the past is recoverable only as eclectic style and image, thus displacing real history with nostalgia.<sup>17</sup> This risks abandoning the question of the past to the conservative appropriation of it evidenced in the ontological position. Welcome II The Terrordome for example begins with newly arrived C17th Black slaves walking into the sea rather than live in the land of death the voice over tells us, belongs to the whites. The film sees this spiritual return to Africa as the model for the Black inhabitants of the futuristic Babylon that the film then projects forward to.

In another manifestation, more influenced by post-structuralism, diaspora explodes social space as well, its emphasis on difference making the bringing together of various cultural identities a highly contingent and transient affair.<sup>18</sup> Again, this risks abandoning the field to the kind of Black vs white simplicities which Welcome II The Terrordome is tapping into. The difficulty though is in formulating any basis for solidarity from within a post-structuralist perspective. Here is Reece Auguiste from Black Audio Collective, responding to a question from Jim Pines who has asked whether the concept of diaspora can bring people from various cultural backgrounds together:

“Not necessarily bring them together but to touch some of their sensibilities. The Hispanic experience is very different from the experiences of those who occupy the English-speaking Caribbean, because those experiences are structured by different engagements with Europe and different engagements within the geographical space that we call the diaspora. So there exists the possibility to tap into that diversity of sensibilities which might have, on a metaphysical level, a unitary dimension, but in its materiality that

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<sup>17</sup> F. Jameson, “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” in Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism Verso, 1991, London, p.20.

<sup>18</sup> B. Schwarz, “Conquerors Of Truth: Reflections on Postcolonial Theory” in The Expansion of England op.cit., p.11.

unitary field has no existence because of its diversity.”<sup>19</sup>

Auguiste's theoretically informed reply is worlds away from the complacent empiricism which dominates mainstream (mostly white) cultural producers. It articulates some of the tensions and problems between social being, cultural identity and consciousness which I want to explore further below. Note for example the emphasis on consciousness and culture ("experiences" and "sensibilities") while material reality has no "unitary field". Yet the historical reality of imperialism and colonialism haunts the discourse ("Europe" is the code word here) even as it relegates it to an abstract "metaphysical level".

To return to specifics: the South Asian diaspora was the direct result of the history of colonialism and imperialism. Labour shortages in the UK and labour surplus' in the ex-colonies meant the British government and employers appealed to Asians as well as Africans and Afro-Caribbeans to 'come home'.<sup>20</sup> Some Asians were already the product of a recent diaspora, having been relocated to East Africa as indentured labour.<sup>21</sup> But wherever they came from, migrants from the ex-colonies suffered similar conditions of discrimination in terms of poor housing and employment.<sup>22</sup> Thus the term 'Black' functioned as a political category to unify people of colour in the face of white racism.

For the white British, the crossing of Black people into the national space raised questions concerning national identity, it opened up what Brah calls a diasporic space that was inhabited not only by migrants and their descendants, "but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous."<sup>23</sup> The indigenous are forced to "reply" to their own existence in terms of "movement and metamorphosis"<sup>24</sup> so that some of the certainties about the timeless continuity of national identity are challenged and thrown open. The more queries one raises about 'origins', the more one finds that almost everyone is the product of some kind of distant or not so distant travel or displacement.

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<sup>19</sup> "Interview with the Black Audio Collective" in *Framework* 35, 1988, p.11.

<sup>20</sup> A. Brah, *op.cit.*, p.21.

<sup>21</sup> A. Brah, *ibid*, pp.30-31.

<sup>22</sup> A. Brah, *ibid*, p.22.

<sup>23</sup> A. Brah, *ibid*, p.209.

<sup>24</sup> I. Chambers, *op.cit.*, p.24.

The media itself is clearly involved in constructing numerous diasporic spaces, as I suggested in chapters one and two. Globalisation has simultaneously increased both the flow of migrants and the “images, narratives and information which cut across and challenge established national and cultural boundaries and identities.”<sup>25</sup> In my two chosen films, the deterritorialization of culture, as it is constructed in symbolic goods (videos, films, music) and exported across national boundaries, is inscribed into the narratives as important sites of identity negotiation.

In post-colonial theory and postmodernism, diaspora, as we have seen, has become a key concept in the theorisation of a particular paradigm of identity and subjectivity. But how convincing is this conceptualisation of identity in explaining how people actually live their lives? An admirably lucid summary by Stuart Hall, of some of the *shifts* in identity which are being proposed and assumed by much contemporary theory, allows us to test this question.<sup>26</sup>

Hall charts what he calls a conceptual history of identity, but it becomes clear that this conceptual history is also making claims about how identity has been constructed and lived within real historical time and how it has changed and shifted. This is a problem because ultimately the persuasiveness of the conceptual history relies on its implicit or explicit anchorage in real history, but, somewhat characteristically of Hall's work in the 1980s (and postmodern theory generally) there is little real engagement with comparative historical evidence. This leaves an abstract schema making untested claims about historical changes which are important in validating the conceptual schema.

Hall maps out three conceptions of identity. The first is the classic individualist of the bourgeois *eighteenth century* Enlightenment. This conception of identity pictures the self as autonomous, centred, unified, moving through time and space “while remaining essentially the same - continuous or ‘identical’ with itself - through out the individual's existence.”<sup>27</sup> We may note that this conception of identity was retained

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<sup>25</sup> M. Gillespie, op.cit., p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> S. Hall, “The Question Of Cultural Identity” in *Modernity And Its Futures* (eds) S. Hall, D. Held, T. McGrew, Polity Press/Open University Press, Cambridge, 1992.

<sup>27</sup> S. Hall, *ibid*, p.275

and reconfigured within the neo-liberal era of Thatcherism. The second conception of identity Hall defines as 'sociological' and this emphasises how identity is forged in the relatively unified interaction between self and society. Contradicting again the claims that this is just a conceptual history, Hall argues that,

"[the] interactive sociological model, with its stable reciprocity between 'inside' and 'outside' is very much a product of the first half of the twentieth century." <sup>28</sup>

Thirdly, there is the postmodern conception of the subject with its emphasis on identity being composed of "several sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities." <sup>29</sup> Yet a curious thing happens when Hall identifies five "great advances in social theory and the human sciences" which feed into this postmodern conception of the self. For the great intellectual currents he identifies belong historically to that period of time which was covered by the apparently relatively unified 'sociological' conception of identity. Marx, Freud and Saussure are named. Admittedly so is Foucault, but his work can be seen as a development of Nietzsche's work a century earlier. The only genuinely new post-war "advance" Hall names is feminism (although even here there is a great deal of theoretical indebtedness to Marx and Freud).<sup>30</sup>

This slippage in the chronology is significant and important because the whole force of Hall's argument rests on the implicit claim that he is describing real historical shifts. What has happened is that Hall has presented us with an excessively unified conception of the 'sociological' subject and an overly unified conception of how individual and national identity was constructed in the past. There is evidence to suggest for example that in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, Englishness was understood as a "heterogeneous, conflictual composite of contrary elements, an identity which is not identical with itself." <sup>31</sup> Indeed that archetypal Victorian book by Robert Louis Stevenson, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886) turned precisely on the question of a divided identity.

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<sup>28</sup> S. Hall, *ibid*, p.284.

<sup>29</sup> S. Hall, *ibid*, pp.276-7.

<sup>30</sup> S. Hall, *ibid*, pp.285-291.

<sup>31</sup> R. Young, Colonial Desire, Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race Routledge, London. 1995, p.3.

Robert Young traces how even Culture And Anarchy, Matthew Arnold's foundational text for an English dominated British culture, turned on Greek and Jewish influences and antagonisms.<sup>32</sup> So Hall's description of a postmodern identity as contradictory and unresolved would hardly have shocked the Victorians let alone Marx or Freud. But then, perhaps sensing that not enough daylight has been placed between the apparently radically new postmodern subject and an earlier one, Hall is tempted as others have been, to push the claims concerning a conflictual identity somewhat further. Thus the whirl of identity shifts up a few gears and is said to be characterised by "discontinuity, fragmentation, rupture and dislocation."<sup>33</sup> But this is too one sided. Nobody lives their life like this on a permanent basis and neither do the core institutions of society. As Terry Eagleton notes, crucial areas of economic, political, juridical and ethical life cannot dispense with the autonomous, unified human subject as some "clapped-out metaphysical fantasy."<sup>34</sup>

The slippages and excesses in Hall's discourse are the result of an attempt to fit history into that linear, undialectical conception which Benjamin argued was a key ideological characteristic within capitalist modernity. This linear conception grasps only one side of the dialectic within commodity relations which Benjamin identified as turning on repetition and novelty.<sup>35</sup> A linear conception of time, with its emphasis on 'stages', on the tabula rasa, the wiping of the slate clean, the rupture with the outmoded past, captures only the novelty/innovation dynamic of commodity relations. It represses the way commodity relations itself are repeating, are retained and reconfigured in 'the new'. In fact all three paradigms of identity (the classic individualist, the "sociological", the "postmodern") may be said to be in evidence today just as they were a century ago.

### **Mapping Commodity Relations In Space**

The difficulty in conceiving this dual aspect of the commodity, its continuities and its ruptures, also extends to mapping social space as well as historical time. It is a genuine difficulty produced by the fact that the

<sup>32</sup> R. Young, *ibid*, pp.55-89.

<sup>33</sup> S. Hall, *op.cit.*, p.279.

<sup>34</sup> T. Eagleton, The Ideology Of The Aesthetic Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, p.377.

<sup>35</sup> S. Buck-Morss, Dialectics Of Seeing, Walter Benjamin And The Arcades Project MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1989, pp.191-193.

novelty/innovation dynamic has intensified in recent years and this presents theory with the challenge of trying to think the two faces of the commodity simultaneously, to hold them in some kind of relationship. This difficulty is illustrated in a suggestive essay by Arjun Appadurai.<sup>36</sup> He attempts to map the vast flows and “disjunctures” between different forces which criss cross the globe and impact upon cultural identities. Appadurai identifies five such flows: ethnoscapes (the vast movement of people, including tourists, immigrants, exiles and refugees); mediascapes (“image-centred, narratives-based accounts of strips of reality”);<sup>37</sup> technoscapes (ever fluid global configurations of technology); finanscapes (the rapid shifts and flows of global capital); and ideoscapes (ideas and beliefs directly connected to political rights, struggles and power).

Appadurai’s definition of the suffix “scapes” is instructive. It is used partly to indicate the constantly shifting, expanding, contracting, amorphous nature of these flows. But it also signifies that theory can have little objective purchase on them. The terrain looks different depending on where you are positioned, that is whether your social being constitutes you as a multinational, the political elite, a sub-national grouping, etc., all the way down to the individual who is “the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes”.<sup>38</sup> This profoundly subjectivising approach interlocks with Appadurai’s stress on the unpredictable directions which these flows have and the equally unpredictable consequences of their numerous intersections and divergences. Appadurai’s model allows us to conjure up a vision of the world in perpetual flux and turbulence and yet, there is something missing. Any sense of the world having systemic qualities has been exploded. Where are the patterns, the cycles, the predictable processes, the continuities, the consolidations of position and power? Appadurai has taken what might be called the mode of production (the people, the technology, the capital) and the superstructure (the ideoscapes and mediascapes) and resolved the problems which that model raises about determinations of one social force on another by replacing it with an extreme multi-causal model in which any clear pattern to determination recedes in favour of an almost Freudian vortex of excess and unpredictability.

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<sup>36</sup> A. Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” in Global Culture, Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity (ed) M. Featherstone, Sage, London, 1995.

<sup>37</sup> A. Appadurai, *ibid*, p.299.

<sup>38</sup> A. Appadurai, *ibid*, p.296.

Just as Stuart Hall's theorisation of identity leads to some fairly exaggerated claims concerning either the radically new nature of a conflictual identity or the virtual dispersion of the self altogether, so when we get down to concrete examples, Appadurai's model lacks the rigours of contemporary or comparative historical evidence. For example, the disjunctures between ideoscapes which tend to be organised within the terms of the nation-state, and mediascapes which flow across nation-state borders, extends as far back as the 1930s where concerns about the impact of Hollywood films on the "British way" of life were raised.

Appadurai argues that the central issue he is attempting to theorise "is the tension between cultural homogenisation and cultural heterogenization."<sup>39</sup> But his model is far more attuned to heterogenization, that is to the differences generated by unpredictable disjunctive flows, than homogenisation. For attention to the latter would precisely require attention to the systemic qualities and continuities across the flows. It is instructive to compare Appadurai with Sivanandan for whom globalisation is not a code word for the explosion of social space into a vortex, but the processes by which structural hierarchies of power between capital and labour and between the First World, the Newly Industrialising and the Underdeveloped countries, are extended and deepened.<sup>40</sup> When it comes to culture though, Sivanandan is at his weakest:

"You do not eat a hamburger, the universal 'food', without taking in the American way of life with it: you do not watch television (and it is mostly American in the Third World) without accepting the American world view; you do not listen to pop music - your pop, their pop, its all pap - without losing your ability to hear other voices, your ability to reflect, weigh, meditate; you do not read the newspapers without losing your sense of truth."<sup>41</sup>

Sivanandan is reading culture off directly from the socioeconomic relations of unequal power which he is mapping and is thus forced into making some very crude assertions as to the nature of cultural commodities and the manner in which they are consumed. Culture is collapsed back into social

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<sup>39</sup> A. Appadurai, p.295.

<sup>40</sup> A. Sivanandan, "New Circuits of Imperialism" *Race and Class* 30 (4), 1989.

<sup>41</sup> A. Sivanandan, *ibid*, p.12.



being as it were, the space between the two, is annulled. Conversely, in Appadurai's model, social being is collapsed into culture; the solid and obdurate qualities of material reality are aestheticised, transformed into something as unpredictable as a surrealist game of association.

## **Black Film and Criticism**

This difficulty in holding social being and cultural identity apart but in some kind of mutually determining relationship, a difficulty which I have suggested stems from grasping the dialectic of commodity relations, can also be traced in the emergence of Black British filmmaking and its critical reception. It is a tension which emerges in debates around aesthetics and the pros and cons of some kind of realist approach on the one hand (i.e. one which foregrounds the social determinations on peoples lives) or approaches which foreground subjectivity and culture (variously characterised as the unleashing of 'fantasy' or the deployment of avant-garde strategies). It should be noted how these debates concerning Black aesthetics have a distinctly British genealogy, mobilising the traidic terms of the 1930s and 1940s, where Griersonian/documentary realism, European Modernism and popular fantasy (e.g. Gainsborough melodramas) set the key terms for so much British filmmaking. And of course, as we saw in chapter one, all three traditions could be found to be at work in a single film ( The Private Life Of Henry VIII ).

For Black British filmmaking, the more 'transparent' realist cinematic languages of the late 1970s and early 1980s focused on the material social determinations of their subjects' lives: Pressure (Horace Ove, 1975) Blacks Britannica (1978) Burning An Illusion (Menelik Shabazz, 1981). According to Kobena Mercer, these films were less adept at addressing "the contradictory *subjective* experience of Black British identity " or interrogating some of the ideological assumptions (of gender as well as 'race') encoded into the narrative realist forms they used.<sup>42</sup> As a result, Mercer and other critics welcomed and theorised the emergence during the 1980s of the avant-garde strategies deployed in such films as Passion of Remembrance (Maureen Blackwood/Isaac Julien, 1986) and Handsworth

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<sup>42</sup> K. Mercer, "Recoding Narratives of Race and Nation" in Black Film/British Cinema ICA Documents, No.7, 1988, (ed) K. Mercer, pp.10-11. See also L. Young, Fear Of The Dark Routledge, London, 1996.

Songs (Black-Audio Film Collective, 1986). These strategies sought to self reflexively interrogate the whole racialised culture of the image (and sounds) and the difficulty of speaking within that culture in a society for whom 'Black' and 'British' have traditionally been seen as mutually exclusive terms.<sup>43</sup>

In line with European Modernism, the medium becomes less 'transparent' and an awareness of its mediation of representation is foregrounded; this in turn interlocks with a more general interest in questions of culture which cinema is a component of. However, something else is also stressed, not intrinsic to avant-garde strategies but specific to the historical and theoretical context: a new stress on the plurality of identities (especially around gender and sexuality and ethnicity) at play across the term 'Black'. As I discussed in chapter two, this new interest is often associated with the postmodern.

These strategies achieved a more popular recognition and profile in the 'fantasy' aesthetics of My Beautiful Laundrette (Stephen Frears/Hanif Kureishi 1985) which Julien Henriques described as articulating "the feelings, contradictions and imagination of the characters rather than any attempt to reflect reality."<sup>44</sup> However, the film is not quite the break with 'realism' Henriques suggests, since it locates its representation of cultural identity and consciousness quite precisely in time and place (the era of Thatcherism and set in inner city London). Nor, despite the new emphasis on the shifting plurality of identities, are the fantasy components of these films yoked to a private consciousness as they were in the gendered travels discussed in the previous chapter. As we shall see later, even where fantasy is articulated in relation to a specific individual character, the fantasy retains a *collective* dimension. There are two reasons for this. Diasporic travels are, as we have seen, collective uprootings and therefore it is more difficult to privatise the meaning of travel and displacement than in the case of the holiday for example, which in our culture, is already profoundly commodified. Secondly, as Laura U. Marks notes, collective memory has a close relationship with diasporan cinema since the latter "make[s] it clear, by virtue of their strained relation to dominant languages, that *no* utterance

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<sup>43</sup> P. Gilroy, There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack Routledge, 1987.

<sup>44</sup> J. Henriques, "Realism and the New Language" in Black Film/British Cinema op.cit., p.19.

is individual.” 45

Tensions between the ‘poles’ of interest (that is a focus on social being or identity) could provoke sharp disagreement as in the case of Mahmood Jamal’s criticisms of My Beautiful Laundrette 46 while Majdhar (Ahmed A. Jamal, 1984) produced by Mahmood was in turn criticised for its realist aesthetics.47 Certainly both Wild West and Bhaji On The Beach are indebted to these earlier theoretical debates and cinematic representations, while at the same time both films are clearly locatable in a post-Thatcher era, where the urgency to address the *national* political context evident in the Kureshi/Frears films, has diminished. What is interesting is that Black and Asian cultural producers were, through-out this period, incredibly interested in the relationship between cultural theory and practice. While fear and dismissal of theory characterises most white cultural producers, the marginality of ethnic minorities encourages a recourse to a language which is conceptual and analytical enough to understand the nature and implications of that marginality. As Gurinder Chadha notes when making I’m British But..., (1989) which tested out in the documentary genre many of the themes that would be fictionalised in Bhaji On The Beach:

“I was reading *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* every time I reached a stumbling point with *I’m British But...* Now what am I doing? How can I do this? And I would read it and everything would become clear. Brilliant. For the first time in my life I had a book which so closely related to what was going on in my head and that I could use.” 48

Unlike American postmodernism which is obsessed with the image in a media saturated society, Bhaji On The Beach and Wild West are influenced by British cultural studies, which helps locate the postmodern themes in that lived experience of everyday life which it has been the realist aesthetic’s special providence.

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45 L.U. Marks, “A Deleuzian politics of hybrid cinema” in Screen, vol.35, Autumn, 1994, p.257.

46 M. Jamal, “Dirty Linen” in Black Film/British Cinema op.cit., pp.21-22.

47 See K. Mercer, op.cit., p.10 and J. Henriques, op.cit., p.19.

48 G. Chadha, in Third Text no.27, Summer 1994, p.57.

## Unity and Difference

I want to now concentrate for the sake of clarity on the work of Stuart Hall and offer a critique of the model of cultural politics and identity which he has developed with some influential effect, during the late 1980s and 1990s. I want to identify a contradiction in Hall's work between his theoretical means and his political ends. My argument is that if one's desired political goals are, in Hall's words, to "build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible" <sup>49</sup> then this cannot be pursued on the basis of a politics of difference. Hall's attempt to rescue some general politics by adding a dash of Gramscian hegemony is on this basis, unconvincing. The thread of the debates as I have mapped them out can now be formulated to offer an alternative position. It is this: *a crucial component of social being, class interests, have become generalised even as a crucial component of consciousness, cultural identity, has become particularised*. Note that I have introduced a third term between social being and identity: consciousness. It is very significant that the concept of consciousness has been almost wholly displaced by that of identity. Consciousness is that mode of cognitive and emotional engagement with the world which is filtered through but is not limited to a *particular* identity. I will develop this formulation later, but for the moment the consequences of this position will be implicit in my critique.

Hall's work is characterised by a particular kind of narrative of recent history and the story which this narrative tells is that the basis of political activity has made a passage from social being to cultural identity. Sometimes Hall explicitly rejects this kind of linear history only to immediately succumb to its power. "New Ethnicities" begins with just such a rejection of linear narratives. He is discussing two "moments" in the formation of Black politics. The first is organised around the unifying term 'Black', which sought to bind people across ethnic differences into a single 'racial' category as a defence against white racism. The second moment, the "new ethnicities" represents an explosion out of the unifying category of 'Black' as various groups become very much more aware of questions around cultural identity. Hall appears to be adamant that these two "moments" are "two phases of the same movement which constantly overlap and

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<sup>49</sup> S. Hall, "New Ethnicities" in Black Film/British Cinema op. cit., p.28.

interweave", <sup>50</sup> but the linear model is symptomatically present in the words used ("shift", "change from" "move towards"). Before long Hall's caution evaporates and he is writing of "the end" of the "essential black subject." <sup>51</sup> Here is the moment where the transition from a dialectical narrative to a linear narrative occurs:

"What is at issue here is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'; that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature." <sup>52</sup>

It is worth taking a close look at this passage because Hall is saying two quite different things, but it is presented as one seamless idea. The first part of the sentence calls for a recognition of the diversity of positions grouped together under the term 'Black'. Fine. The second part tells us that that unifying term is a constructed category, not grounded in Nature. It is not given, it cannot be assumed. But *this* assumes that people did think it was grounded in Nature. One wonders how likely that is. Did people of colour, with different cultures, traditions and religions simply fall 'naturally' together in a society as divided and competitive as capitalism? One suspects not. More likely people were well aware that this position had to be constructed and not just in discourse either. At any rate, Hall does not present evidence to the contrary but declares:

"Films are not necessarily good because black people make them. They are not necessarily 'right on' by virtue of the fact that they deal with the black experience." <sup>53</sup>

You would only think that Black films were good and 'right on' because Black people made them if you believed that 'Black' was rooted in some fixed, essentialist natural position. If however you believed that what it

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<sup>50</sup> S. Hall, "New Ethnicities" *ibid*, p.27.

<sup>51</sup> S. Hall, *ibid*, p.28.

<sup>52</sup> S. Hall, *ibid*.

<sup>53</sup> S. Hall, *ibid*, p.28.

meant to be Black was a site of political and cultural struggle, that it was - as Hall reminds us only a few lines ago - a construct, then why would you believe this? In fact it is Hall who is sliding 'Black' into the category of a particular, fixed, essential politics which naturalises itself. In the process his argument, as with so many who have polemicised for a new sensitivity to 'difference', practices a massive homogenisation of the different politics that have intersected with that term (or earlier racial terms like 'negro') and the different ways those politics have formulated the relationship between the terms 'Black' and 'white'. Can it really be that all Black politics has been conducted on the basis of a binary opposition between the good Black and "the bad old essential white subject." ? <sup>54</sup> At a stroke, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Nation of Islam, Malcolm X, Black Panthers, to name just some Black American political traditions, are lumped together.

"If the black subject and black experience are not stabilised by Nature or by some other essential guarantee, then it must be the case that they are constructed historically, culturally, politically - and the concept which refers to this is 'ethnicity'." <sup>55</sup>

This is a non sequitur. It begins by taking the signifier 'Black' and attaching it to the signified 'historically constructed identity' but it ends with 'ethnicity' replacing 'Black' as the signifier for that signified, leaving 'Black' tumbling towards an irredeemable association with Nature. The idea that the meaning of 'Black' might be a site of struggle does not appear to be an option, although it once was: "...we previously had to recuperate the term 'Black', from its place in a system of negative equivalences." <sup>56</sup> In another example of linear history Hall seems to feel that 'Black' can be left behind and that it is now time to move on and decouple ethnicity from its equivalence in dominant discourses, with nationalism, imperialism, racism and the state. So, it appears that there is quite a lot of work to do, especially for the theorist of discourse. But why it is not worth trying to decouple 'Black' from the homophobia and sexism which Hall rightly identifies as currents within Black politics, is not quite clear, unless of course, 'Black' has passed into the category of Nature (a mistake Hall has just told us we should not make).

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<sup>54</sup> S. Hall, *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> S. Hall, *ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>56</sup> S. Hall, *ibid.*

My point is that Hall rather too quickly dumps a category which indicates some shared interests in his rush to get to a politics based on difference. Yet it is perfectly possible for Hall's new ethnicities to simply break up essentialist identities into smaller units. Now, Hall is careful to distinguish between the kind of difference he is talking about, mobile, shifting, embracing difference,<sup>57</sup> and the notion of difference as cultural incompatibility championed by the New Racism. In practice though, as Paul Gilroy has suggested in relation to anti-racist policies in child adoption cases, the two positions can start to look uncomfortable alike.<sup>58</sup> Hall recognises that confronted with *racism*, minorities may beat a "strategic retreat to more defensive identities" themselves, but while he recognises that the "pressures of difference" may produce a "retreat to ethnic absolutism" amongst *white* ethnicities, he does not seem to recognise that the *assertion* of cultural difference (and not just racism) can produce something similar amongst Black ethnicities and not only in relation to white ethnicities but in relation to each other.<sup>59</sup>

What is interesting is the role of Channel Four which funded many of the Black and Asian films which influenced Hall's thinking on ethnicity. As early as 1983, Gilroy criticised Channel Four for fragmenting Black programming into ethnic compartments, breaking down the commonalities "which the communities have struggled to create" and consigning "'West Indians' to one ideological Bantustan and 'Asians' to another."<sup>60</sup> Such apartheid was practised in the name of "a pluralist or multicultural understanding of racial segmentation" which "inflates the cultural aspects of racial differentiation to the exclusion of all other factors and makes them the determining agent in 'race relations'."<sup>61</sup>

Hall has precisely excluded "all other factors" by collapsing interests into culture and then exploding the latter category into multiple identities. Looking at the fragments, Hall reaches for his trusty Gramscianism to hold out the tentative possibility of some contingent alliances. Hegemony he

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<sup>57</sup> S. Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" in Culture, Globalization And The World System Contemporary Conditions For The Representation Of Identity (ed) A. D. King, Macmillan, London, 1991, pp.50-52.

<sup>58</sup> P. Gilroy, There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack op.cit., pp.64-65.

<sup>59</sup> S. Hall "The Question Of Cultural Identity" op.cit., p.307.

<sup>60</sup> P. Gilroy, "C4 - Bridgehead Or Bantustan?" Screen vol.24, 4-5, 1983, p.131.

<sup>61</sup> P. Gilroy, *ibid*.

suggests, occurs when “a certain configuration of local particularities try to dominate the whole scene.”<sup>62</sup> Such a configuration of progressive politics though would be like the patterns temporarily arranged by the kaleidoscope. With each twist a new pattern would order itself while the machine which determines the patterns remains intact. As Benjamin said, using the metaphor in a different context: “The kaleidoscope must be smashed.”<sup>63</sup>

### **Humpty Dumpty Sat On A Wall...**

An increasing sensitivity to cultural differences, plurality and flux has correspondingly led to an increasing *insensitivity* to material differences.<sup>64</sup> This has gone hand in hand with a critique, as we have seen, of ‘essences’. Yet, as Gregor McLennan points out, if we want to retain any ability to explain things “then we are compelled at some point to decide, in principle at any rate, which tendencies in a complex process lie at the heart of that process and which do not.”<sup>65</sup> ‘Essence’ though has become the boo-word of a generation of academics, using it interchangeably with fixity (ignoring that essential tendencies can be processes) and with Nature (ignoring that essences can be socially and historically constructed). Attempts to rid the world of all notions of essence, by using the levelling tactic that everything is a construct only end up cutting the ground from under them, leaving unanswered and unanswerable the question of why they speak from *their* particular position - what ‘essences’ do they attach themselves to? ‘Essence’ as a negative condition is openly ascribed to the position being opposed (e.g. ‘Black’) while implicitly smuggled back into the preferred position (the ‘essence’ of new ethnicities is their congruence with liberal pluralism, progressive politics, etc).

My problem with Hall’s position is that he reduces interests (social being) to identity. Identity is then pluralised so that the multiple, fragmented identities/interests have about as much chance of being reassembled as Humpty Dumpty after the fall. At this point then I want to reintroduce and think through the concept of class relations as a way of trying to create a gap and a relationship between interests, which are generalised, and

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<sup>62</sup> S. Hall, “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities” op.cit., p.67.

<sup>63</sup> S. Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing op.cit., p.201.

<sup>64</sup> R. Ferguson, Representing ‘Race’, Ideology, identity and the media Arnold, London, 1998, p.82.

<sup>65</sup> G. McLennan, “Post-Marxism and the ‘Four Sins’ of Modernist Theorizing” in New Left Review 218, July/August, 1996, p.66.



(cultural) identities which are particularised. It is important though that identity is not taken as the *sum* of consciousness: our consciousness can expand far beyond our particular identity, and indeed the media and the multiple worlds it brings, are crucial to this.

I take my cue from Gilroy's ambivalent reworking of the concept of class in There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack. Having discussed the emergence of new social movements (women's movements, environmental movements, anti-nuclear movements, citizen movements and so on), Gilroy ends his book on this note:

"...if these struggles (some of which are conducted in and through 'race') are to be called class struggles, then class analysis must itself be thoroughly overhauled. I am not sure whether the labour involved in doing this makes it either a possible or a desirable task...the political languages of class and socialism have been so thoroughly discredited by Labourism at home and 'actually existing socialism' abroad that they may be completely beyond resuscitation." <sup>66</sup>

I want to suggest a little more confidently that it is both desirable and possible to rethink class because class remains a material reality. While not underestimating the debilitating effects of the way particular "languages of class and socialism" have been institutionalised and practised, to reduce the emancipation of humanity from commodity relations to the bad practices of such empirical phenomena, is neither theoretically or historically justified.

The first thing we have to do is to find or reclaim a term which completely severs the concept of class from any association with its sociological definitions where by class position is defined through variable factors such as income, occupation, life style, education and so on. All these things are important, subjectively and objectively: I do not want to displace these factors but I want to counterpoint another definition of class and another ontological reality against the sociological tradition. When I write the signifier 'proletariat' a host of particular identities (gender, occupation, 'race') are likely to coalesce in the reader's mind. Just such an assumption is at work in this passage from Gilroy.

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<sup>66</sup> P. Gilroy, There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack, op.cit., p.245.

“At the structural level, it has become imperative to question the analytic priority accorded by the Marxian tradition to forms of production which directly generate surplus value. This priority is no longer justified either by the diminishing size or the political character of this group of workers. Less than 30% of Britain’s working population now performs work of this type.” <sup>67</sup>

Here the proletariat, the traditional agency for socialism within Marxism, is conflated with manual, manufacturing work whose size is diminishing, whose ‘political character’ is fixed and irredeemably conservative (a familiar theme in Left politics during the 1980s) <sup>68</sup> and who are being replaced, apparently, by workers who do not produce surplus value! This conflation between the working class and a *particular* cultural identity suggests that when we turn our attention to other cultural identities we can no longer be talking about class.

Wallerstein reminds us however that there is no ‘ideal type’ for either the bourgeoisie or labour. These categories designate social constructs, not static phenomenon. As such they must be emptied of any *necessary* cultural content (and any necessary political beliefs). Classes are “in the process of perpetual re-creation and hence of constant change of form and composition.” <sup>69</sup> But what are classes? In fact this requires little rethinking or reworking. As Wallerstein would no doubt be happy to acknowledge, his definition of class would hardly cause the ghost of Marx to slap his head and issue that Homer Simpson sound (doh!). The bourgeoisie are defined as “those who receive surplus-value they do not themselves create and use some of it to accumulate capital.” They do this of course by reinvesting the surplus value. The proletariat are defined as those who do not own the means of production but work them, selling their labour power and yielding “part of the value they have created to others” <sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> P. Gilroy, *ibid*, p.18.

<sup>68</sup> As V. Walkerdine notes, “the respectable white working class were also viewed as the biggest problem in the implementation of anti-racist and anti-sexist policies.” See “Subject To Change Without Notice: psychology, postmodernity and the popular” in mapping the subject, geographies of cultural transformation (eds) S. Pile and N. Thrift pp.314-315.

<sup>69</sup> I. Wallerstein, “Class Conflict in the Capitalist World-Economy” in I. Wallerstein and E. Balibar, Race, Nation, Class, Ambiguous Identities Verso, London, 1991, p.118.

<sup>70</sup> I. Wallerstein, *ibid*, p.120.

This starkly dichotomous definition requires us to redefine some of the various *sociological* class strata as positions within the proletariat. The proletariat is not unified, either culturally or materially. Different groups of workers have secured variable *returns* on the surplus value which labour collectively has already yielded. This raises the question of the middle class. We may note that Benjamin's investigation of Baudelaire's nineteenth century flaneur was undertaken precisely to demonstrate the objective convergence of interests between the intellectuals and the working class in the 1930s.<sup>71</sup> I would argue that today the further penetration of every aspect of life by commodity relations makes Benjamin's position even more persuasive in the post-1979 period. My analysis of the science fiction films in chapter two was predicated on this argument. Moreover, just as globalisation has uncoupled the link between nation-state and cultural identity, so it has uncoupled the relation between class and culture. If in the 1930s, there was a huge cultural gulf between the middle and working classes, each having their own relatively homogeneous culture in isomorphic relation to their class, this is today, rather less true.

Although the intellectual has secured a greater return on the surplus value (materially and culturally) and is comparatively hugely privileged vis-a-vis the supermarket checkout worker, it ultimately makes no more sense to drive a class wedge between them than it does to drive a class wedge between the check out attendant and the Guatemalan women working in Korean export factories stitching jackets for the American market.<sup>72</sup> The supermarket worker enjoys a hugely better return on the surplus value which labour has created than the Guatemalan. Does that mean the former, in relation to the latter, is no longer part of the proletariat? Of course, for the British working class, the Imperial legacy has, historically, meant precisely that.

However, globalisation allows us to see just how limiting the nationally bounded sociological definitions of class were and are. Class is a *relation*, not a particular kind of work, not a particular level of income, not a particular level of cultural endowment, nor is it formed by particular kinds of people. All these elements are historically contingent. All these elements and more are related to one's position within *the* class but they do not of

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<sup>71</sup> S. Buck Morss, op.cit., p.304.

<sup>72</sup> D. Ransom, "Jeans, the big stitch up", New Internationalist No.302, June 1998, p.8.

themselves constitute the essence of class as a relationship between those who wield surplus value as power and those who yield up the surplus value they create. The middle class are privileged for sure, and as I discussed in chapter two, they have an important role in coordinating the circuits of capital.<sup>73</sup> But they are at the end of the day coordinators. They do not control the agenda. They implement it - which is one reason why they are able to combine high degrees of intelligence (necessary for implementing complex processes) with a crushing conformity (necessary for not calling those complex processes into question).

So, the proletariat are not homogeneous, either culturally or materially. As Gilroy notes, there are "fundamental doubts about the degree of homogeneity" which exists amongst the category of labour. There are differences (although Gilroy automatically equates these with divisions) between the employed and unemployed, between men and women and generational differences.<sup>74</sup> *But why are we so sure that class consciousness depends on cultural and material homogeneity?* Once again, the assumption made is that consciousness can be reduced to our identity and that our identity can be collapsed into our social being (or interests).

The internal pressure within my own thesis for thinking about class comes from Benjamin. As we have seen, Benjamin's interest in porosity anticipates contemporary cultural theory's interest in the improvisational and shifting nature of identity. However, in the Benjamin oeuvre, no concept is more resistant to assimilation to the priorities of much contemporary cultural theory, than that of the collective unconscious. This concept indicates how collectivity is an objective feature of our social relations, but it is also repressed in the competition for resources, profits, labour and other rewards. Consciousness of the collective would count as the subjective appreciation of this objectively given situation. Unfortunately, much contemporary cultural theory reproduces this repression, as we have seen in relation to the concept of diasporan identities. But if the concept of the collective unconscious is above all a concept about structures, does it have a corresponding social agent that can become conscious? The notion of collectivity suggests some level of generality: it points to *labour* more than

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<sup>73</sup> J. Clarke, New Times and Old Enemies: Essays On Cultural Studies and America Harper Collins Academic, 1991, pp.48-49.

<sup>74</sup> P. Gilroy, There Ain't No Black In The Union Jack op.cit., p.20.

the “working class”, which as we have seen, has become particularly corrupted by sociological definitions. Labour, as a category, is more inclusive, stretching from the Guatemalan women in Korean factories, to the supermarket checkout worker, to the unpaid labour of domestic work. And while labour is an inclusive category, it is not so inclusive as to abolish class conflict. Labour still implies it’s antithesis: capital.

Gilroy rejects the “polarised” definition of class that I am working with because he cannot see how this can be connected to struggles outside the immediate sphere of production.<sup>75</sup> If we recall that class is a relation in which surplus value is extracted and wielded as material and cultural power, then there is, I would argue, no problem in expanding the definition of class struggle.

The extraction/generation, reinvestment and reproduction of the conditions of surplus value become the key zones around which the bifurcated class division produces the “multi-modal” points of conflict Gilroy is rightly concerned to address. At the point of production (the ‘classic’ workers struggle) surplus value is generated and extracted (in the service industries of course as much as in traditional manufacturing) and for that reason, in the last instance, this has to be the key point of contestation if we are to remain interested in socialist alternatives to capitalism. Around the reinvestment of surplus value cluster many of the new social movements contesting the how, why, where and when of various new commodities (from nuclear weapons, to roads, to genetically modified food). The reproduction of the conditions of surplus value refers to the social institutions which attempt to regulate the historically determined character of capitalism at any particular moment (coercive structures such as the police and the judiciary, educational structures, political structures, family structures, etc); in other words, the superstructures, in orthodox Marxist language.

I am trying to suggest that there is a generalisation of interests going on even as there is a particularisation and fragmentation of identities. The key issue is whether consciousness can link these two processes together. The particular identities which people have are neither secondary nor impediments to class consciousness. Particular identities are the indispensable core around which people come to a recognition of their self.

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<sup>75</sup> P. Gilroy, *ibid*, p.28.

their grievances, their pain, their resistances and their joys. Class consciousness grows out of our particular identities, linking the particular to the general. It would be a very limited class consciousness that is not routed through the particular, while the particular is prone to separatism and racism without class consciousness.

Marxism must work on the two planes of the particular and the general precisely because capitalism does as well. So does the question 'race' in its own peculiar and contradictory way. On the one plane racism homogenises the Other. As Hall points out, "it is one of the predicates of racism that 'you can't tell the difference because they all look the same.'" <sup>76</sup> This is one of his arguments for a politics based on difference. From Adorno onwards (and with the fate of the Jewish and other outsiders in Nazi Germany in mind) Marxism has linked fear of difference (identity thinking) with the homogenisation dynamic built into commodity relations. But as Hall and Appadurai both point out, capitalism also has another dynamic: the generation of difference. As Hall puts it:

"...this concentrated, over corporate, over-integrated, over-concentrated and condensed form of economic power which lives culturally through difference...is constantly teasing itself with the pleasures of the transgressive Other." <sup>77</sup>

Like Appadurai, Hall is rather more concerned with cultural differences than he is with social solidarity or with material differences. Yet material differences are inextricably linked to cultural differences within capitalism. Within racism there is the notion of an ontological difference which cuts against the universal principles which on one level, the global expansion of commodity relations has produced. According to racism the logic goes like this: 'they' may be all the same when lumped together, but 'they' are also radically (culturally) different from 'me' so they do not deserve the same rights, the same treatment, the same access to material resources, the same claims to equality as 'me.' Thus, universalism is indispensable to capitalism (helping for example to draw people into complex and extensive networks of trade and cultural exchange) but it is also problematic. The ideals of

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<sup>76</sup> S. Hall, "New Ethnicities" op.cit., p.28.

<sup>77</sup> S. Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity" in Culture, Globalization and the World System (ed) A.D.King, op.cit., p.31.

equality which are founded on universalism come directly into conflict with the opportunistic amorality which is capitalist accumulation. As Wallerstein argues, racism and sexism help resolve this conflict precisely because they are “anti-universalistic” doctrines and thus legitimise “a far lower reward to a major segment of the workforce than could ever be justified on the basis of merit.” <sup>78</sup>

The point then is that if the emphasis in progressive politics swings too far towards the particularity of identities, it not only fragments the possibilities for alliances, but it can feed cultural difference directly into a legitimisation of material inequalities and racism. If the emphasis swings too far towards the universal then the specific conditions of particular identities risks being ignored or taken for granted. Cultural *exchange* may help link the particular (identity) with the general (interests); conversely, a sense of cultural difference does not necessarily prevent such a linkage because cultural identity is not to be equated with interests. X does not need Y to dress like her, speak like her, look like her, enjoy the same leisure activities or the same sexual practices as her. It is social being that X and Y share as I have defined it vis-a-vis the category of the proletariat: i.e. a similar relation to the bourgeoisie in all their many forms and manifestations; a similar struggle against commodification; a similar struggle to become subjects and not be simply objects of historical processes co ordinated and at least partially controlled by others. Whatever their differences or their similarities, there is one difference which connects X and Y and makes all the difference.

### **Bhaji On The Beach**

Bhaji On The Beach practices what it preaches. Composed of Indian mythic fantasy sequences, British naturalism, and Carry On farce, Bhaji On The Beach valorises identities which work with hybridity, cultural mixing and fusion (e.g. the film’s Punjabi version of Cliff Richard’s ‘We’re All Going On A Summer Holiday’ crossed with Bhangra). This is to say that it dramatises the diaspora in its *forward movement* as a series of cultural dispersals and reconfigurations. The film sets up a debate between this dynamic and that other definition associated with the diaspora which

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<sup>78</sup> I. Wallerstein, “The Ideological Tensions of Capitalism: Universalism Versus Racism and Sexism” in Race, Nation Class op.cit., p.34.

involves a symbolic movement back in time and space to reconnect with an imagined origin conceived as a unitary cultural sphere. It is this tension between identities based on fixed and timelessly conceived traditions and customs and identities which are provisional, permeable, open to change and recombination, which the film sets into motion.

Unlike A Room With A View and Shirley Valentine the characters in Bhaji On The Beach do not have to cross the legal/cultural boundary of the nation for travel to ask transformative questions of them. In a move that fuses the Asian characters with that most quintessential of English working class activities (the seaside holiday trip) the characters only have to travel to the boundary of the nation (Blackpool in this case). This reflects how much more ambivalent the question of 'home' already is for people negotiating the terms of their Britishness and Asianness in contemporary Britain.

This effects the narrative structure of the film. The plot transformations which leaving 'home' for a day brings, are actually continuations of plot lines that begin at 'home'. The film starts by introducing us to various relationships *already* in transition. We are introduced to Ranjit whose parents insist that 'English divorce' is not an option for his wife, Ginder, who has left him. Concerned with the continuation of the family line, his parents send him out to return Ginder and their son Amrit to the house. Ranjit then must travel to restore the status quo and traditional social relations based on custom. Ginder must travel into modernity and an uncertain future outside the traditional extended or even nuclear family unit. Then there is Hashida - who has been having a relationship, unknown to her parents, with Oliver, who is Black. She discovers she is pregnant, and initially at least, Oliver rejects Hashida. In this he is encouraged by his separatist friend. However, when they meet up in Blackpool the couple reaffirm their commitment to each other.

Thus for Bhaji On The Beach the transformations which the characters undergo as a result of their travels, are only the working through of plot lines which begin back in Birmingham - and this is because, the film suggests, transformation is part of their condition of life back at 'home'. This is in contrast to the dramatic structure of films like a A Room With A



View, or Shirley Valentine. In these films the geo-cultural spaces characters enter are both outside their normal cultural orbit and provoke profoundly new directions precisely because 'home' was conceived as such a fixed and stable point. These films operate around a firm demarcation between self and Other, familiar and foreign. They also, as we have seen, operate around a firm distinction between tourist and traveller, valorising the latter, but not so convincingly as to abandon the former as a mode of (self) exploration. Bhaji On The Beach deconstructs the binary, altogether. It is significant I think that it does this by mobilising the collective rather than the romantic gaze. John Urry associates the romantic gaze with undisturbed natural beauty, emphasising "solitude, privacy and a personal, semi-spiritual relationship with the object of the gaze."<sup>79</sup> The romantic gaze works by distinguishing a cultured elite who are the real travellers, from the uncultured masses who are merely conceived as ignorant, dependent tourists. And yet within this binary opposition, we find a key notion common to both the tourist and the romantic traveller: another binary opposition between us and (the foreign) them, the tourist/traveller and the Other.

By contrast the collective gaze depends on and acknowledges its roots in mass tourism and is unembarrassed by the presence of other people who are also tourists. The seaside resort and coach holiday are the quintessential sites/sights of and for the collective gaze.<sup>80</sup> The film's collective day out to Blackpool fits this description perfectly. This more plebian gaze has no need of an elitist distinction between tourist and traveller and therefore it has no need for the binary opposition between us and the Other. In one sense the film is arguing that everyone is a traveller. The film's narration is clearly on the side of contingency through interaction with difference: the very essence of the traveller. The key question which this raises though, is what happens to solidarity and alliances if everyone is always on the move? In another sense the film is also saying that we are all tourists by suggesting that we have as much chance as accessing an authentic culture or past as the tourist. But as I have suggested in relation to the concept of 'essence', abolishing authenticity completely seems neither possible or desirable. I will come back to these points in discussing the film's conclusion.

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<sup>79</sup> J. Urry, The Tourist Gaze Sage, London, 1990, p.45.

<sup>80</sup> J. Urry, *ibid*, p.46 and p.95.

The position which the film constructs around diasporan contingency is contrasted with two other positions within the film. The first is separatism, represented by Oliver's friend, Ajay. When Oliver asks him what happened to Black solidarity, Ajay declares that:

"Black don't mean not white anymore...Forget the melting pot and respect the differences. But that's what's missing between us and them: respect...you try fusion and you get confusion."

Significantly, this exchange between Oliver and his friend is taking place in the university dorm kitchen where two Chinese students are also present. Ajay has an exchange with one of them who has accused him of stealing his eggs. This is important because it nods towards the question of material resources and how the struggle over them turns a separatism based on 'respect' to one of incomprehension and conflict.

The second alternative to diasporan hybridity is much more substantially engaged with during the course of the film: this is the position associated with nostalgia for a timeless, unchanged, unified home. According to Iain Chambers mobility and contingency makes the search for 'authentic' cultures and identities paradoxically, unauthentic.<sup>81</sup> Certainly Bhaji On The Beach could be enlisted to support this view, but it also cuts the subject off from other potentially more progressive resources of hope that may be emitted from the past. For example, I think there is something very powerful and liberating in the way that Shirley Valentine recaptures a lost aspect of her personal past in order to go forward. Nevertheless, Bhaji On The Beach offers a coherent critique of certain versions of remembering the past.

This point is made most clearly through the character of Asha. Significantly she runs an Indian video shop. These examples of travelling symbolic goods provide the cultural reference points beyond the British national imaginary. In her Southall based ethnographic study, Gillespie notes how Hindi films on video are used as a form of cultural negotiation. She detects a generational difference though, suggesting that "while young people use Indian films to deconstruct 'traditional culture', many parents

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<sup>81</sup> I. Chambers, migrancy, culture, identity op.cit., p.72.

use them to foster cultural and religious traditions.”<sup>82</sup> Asha’s fantasies begin by investing cultural and religious traditions with unquestioned authority, but eventually crack under the pressures of modernity. In so doing, Asha travels across the generations to make some sort of alliance with the younger women.

To start with, Asha has a series of fantasies where she worries about the purity of Indian identity and customs being diluted by westernisation. In one fantasy, she projects these onto Hashida after she learns of Hashida’s pregnancy. Her fantasy scenario appears to be located in a large white tent populated by various characters in traditional Indian dress. Hashida however, visibly pregnant with her child from Oliver, wears a short red dress, revealing top with glittering sequins, red boots, blonde wig and is smoking a cigarette. She is obviously enjoying the consternation of her parents and relatives. The fantasy ends with Hashida coughing on the cigarette. We cut back to the bus, on its way to Blackpool - and in fact it is Ginder who is coughing on the cigarette smoke of Rekha. This is an ironic piece of editing. For Rekha, is visiting from Bombay - but far from embodying a ‘pure’ Indianess, Rekha, with her sunglasses, short skirt, clutching her Hello magazine and smoking through a cigarette filter, is the most westernised of all the older women on the bus. Asha then, the film suggests, is looking backwards for her utopia, to a nostalgically constructed past. But what we must also note is the way the way her fantasy is contextualised within the ongoing debate and issues generated by the other characters and their trip to the seaside. It is a fantasy that is commenting on and is being influenced by what is happening around her. Asha’s fantasy then retains a strong collective dimension, even when, as we shall see, she is fantasising directly about her own life.

Let us just consider a little more the significance of Blackpool. It is interesting that Birmingham and the route to Blackpool is figured as the territories where ethnicities are separating and confronting each other across a terrain of hostility and confusion. There is white on Asian racism, Asian on Asian racism (Ranjit’s parents for example, referring to Ginder, declare that ‘you can’t trust the dark ones’), Asian on Black racism, Black on Asian racism, etc.

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<sup>82</sup> M. Gillespie, *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change* op.cit., p.87.

Blackpool then becomes the site of another kind of response to the Other - this is the response not of fear, but of desire. The concept of desire has become increasingly important in post-colonial theory and was used by Homi K. Bhabha to call into question the somewhat monolithic conception of Orientalism proposed by Said.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, the cultural historian John Mackenzie has argued, in relation to Orientalism in painting, that the Other, was not always and perhaps not even typically, conceived as inferior. Rather, desires for things perceived to have been lost in the English identity could be imagined in the Other and so the latter could function as a vehicle for critiquing Englishness as presently constituted. Mackenzie notes the chivalric and medieval references in orientalist paintings of the Arab world, the “endless parade of equestrianism, of Arab knights bearing their long muskets like lances,” of hunting, and hawking.<sup>84</sup> He speculates that for the buyers of these cultural commodities, such paintings represented a lament concerning various aspects of capitalist modernity and its discontents. The fascination with the East lay less in a concern to provide a cultural legitimisation for its domination, as Said and others would have it, than as a way of satisfying “an atavistic reaction to modern industrialism.”<sup>85</sup>

There are similarities here with Benjamin’s argument that utopian fantasies within modernity often return to the distant past and emit critical pulses into the present. However, Benjamin was aware that the conditions of enunciation must also be taken into account if one is to understand the ideological purposes to which philosophies and representations of history can serve. Mackenzie is weak on this point. He argues that this desire to find what has been lost in the self via the Arab, suggests a pressing need for a theorisation of cross cultural influences rather more than theories of Otherness. However, desire and appreciation can still be motivated by the binary logic of Otherness, so that, for example, the latter is frozen in time, removed from history, serving primarily as a vehicle for the observer’s fantasies. In this, Mackenzie’s bourgeois patrons of orientalist painting seem to me to be operating a highly touristic and Otherizing gaze, even though it is motivated by desire rather than fear.

<sup>83</sup> H.K. Bhabha, “The other question; difference, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism” in *The Politics of Theory* F. Barker (ed), Colchester, 1983.

<sup>84</sup> J. M. Mackenzie, *Orientalism, history, theory and the arts* Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995, p.55.

<sup>85</sup> J. M. MacKenzie, *ibid*, p.59.

Quite self consciously, Bhaji On The Beach signifies Blackpool as the place where a nostalgic and mythical Englishness comes into contact with an assortment of exoticised Others. Fish and chips with curry powder, Union Jacks and cowboys, camels and mermaids, pythons and snake charmers. Here Asha meets the quintessential English gentleman, Ambrose Waddington. The film makes brilliant strategic use of this character. He takes her to see the white English clapping away to the Wurlitzer organ and then onto his beloved theatre - once the jewel in the crown of a now declining middlebrow culture. As they stand on the stage of the empty theatre, Ambrose conjures up the ghosts of audiences' past while lamenting the decline of "our popular culture". The gaze with which he perceives Asha is similarly nostalgic and corresponds closely with Mackenzie's bourgeois patrons of Orientalist paintings. Ambrose mis-recognises in Asha his desire for a culture that (he imagines) holds steadfastly to its traditions and its past, checking the advance of history. Through Asha he expresses a similarly atavistic reaction to modernity. Ironically, his feeling that the white English have abandoned their proud cultural traditions ironically parallels Asha's own anxieties concerning British Asians.

It is the very traditions and customs which Waddington admires which bring on another anxiety-fantasy for Asha - who is concerned that she has transgressed traditional customs by being alone Waddington. But this time, Asha talks back to the Indian gods who berate her - declaring that "duty" and "sacrifice" have crushed her own educational and career ambitions. This is the only moment in the film where we glimpse what Shirley Valentine constructs its entire narrative around: a personal history articulated within a modernist knowledge (the idea of progress, liberty, knowledge). Crucially, *this* (not the film's more postmodern elements) lays the ground for her defence of Ginder when she is attacked by Ranjit at the end of the film (again, fantasy feeds back into the collective). Like Shirley Valentine, Asha comes to see the appeal to tradition and custom as legitimising resources for patriarchy. And some sense of authentic social being has been affirmed, for on what other basis can the film suggest that Ginder is better off without Ranjit?

At the start of the day trip, the organiser, Simi articulates, from the 'margins' of the storylines, the political voice of the text, rather like the

Ricky Tomlinson character in Riff Raff. (Ken Loach, 1991) or Bob's brother-in-law in Raining Stones (Ken Loach, 1993). Simi urges the women to take this as an opportunity to escape from the "double yoke" of racism and sexism, and although there are looks of bemusement from the older generation, by the end of the film, something like a collective anti-sexist and cross-generational identity has been forged. We have then, what Hall called "a certain configuration of local particularities" <sup>86</sup> coming together in a way, which for example, the romantic privatised gaze in Shirley Valentine, frustrated. But this feminist hegemony can only be imagined, as Simi's speech makes clear, outside the established structures of racism and sexism; it can only be imagined in the escapism of the day out; it can only take root in the terrain of leisure and cultural pleasure; it is temporary, transient, the women are brought together on the bus for a day: but the question of what happens to the women's solidarities once they have returned and dispersed to their established structures, remains a pressing and unanswered one. In this regard, the film's ability to imagine or pose only a temporary, transient alliance or configuration of particularities, demonstrates perfectly the weaknesses of the politics of difference argued for by Hall and the loss of focus on persistent, structural inequalities when, as with Appadurai, the real becomes aestheticised.

## **Wild West**

The problem which any theory of cross-cultural exchange needs to address, is the material conditions of unequal relations of power which frame such an exchange. In one sense, Wild West is all about how far one can push "the aesthetics of the diaspora, the aesthetics of creolization" as Hall puts it, <sup>87</sup> vis-a-vis the material conditions in which culture is produced and consumed. It is not simply disciplinary differences which produce such starkly contrasting accounts of diaspora as Sivanandan and Chambers: it is politics as well. For Sivanandan, the refugees, migrants, and asylum-seekers constitute the "flotsam and jetsam of latter-day imperialism", performing the dirty, low paid, insecure jobs, often "rightless, rootless, peripatetic and temporary - illegal even." <sup>88</sup> Now, this describes a particular fraction of people, none of whom appear in either of the films I am discussing. These

<sup>86</sup> S. Hall, "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" op.cit., p.67.

<sup>87</sup> S. Hall, "The Local and the Global" op.cit., p.38.

<sup>88</sup> A. Sivanandan, "New Circuits of Imperialism" op.cit., pp.15-16.

films explore the intersection of being Asian and British, rooted *and* displaced. But it reminds us about questions of power which get concealed by abstract generalisations. Iain Chambers for example argues that “the modern metropolitan figure is the migrant.” This theoretical framework and the fluid realities it explores downplays, as I have suggested, the continuities in the distribution of power which connect the past and the present and which therefore beg the question: what conceptual categories and histories do we need to hold onto? For Chambers, the migrant rewrites the “urban script” as “an earlier social order and cultural authority is now turned *inside out and dispersed*” (my emphasis).<sup>89</sup> To which one is tempted to reply: really? Obviously there have been changes, the novelty dynamic of commodity relations guarantees that much. But where is the sense of the repetition and reiteration of power?

Certainly Wild West explores the extent to which deterritorialization means that there is no necessary connection between culture and territory or, more radically, between culture and ethnicity. The film also testifies to the utopian dynamics underpinning the consumption of cultures which have travelled from elsewhere as well as the utopian impulse implicit in the travels of persons. Shot on location in London, Southall, the story concerns three Muslim brothers and a Sikh friend who have formed a country and western band. As Gillespie notes, Asian music has constructed identificatory connections between the American Indian and Asian Indian,<sup>90</sup> but here we have Asians appropriating the culture and ethnicity of white oppressors vis-a-vis both the American Indian and the Black American. The bedroom of the lead character, Zaf, is painted with pictures of the Lone Ranger. But if the racist assumptions governing that character were not enough, Zaf also has the American Confederate flag in his room as well, symbol of a racist South reluctant to abolish slavery.

In effect the band are refusing to let Black as a political category limit their cultural reference points or allow culture to have a fixed meaning. As culture travels via the media, so its indigenisation elsewhere transforms its meanings and/or provides a repertoire of meanings and cultural practices not available within the ‘immediate’ territory (whether locally or nationally). Although Zaf’s mother tells him that “there are no Pakistani cowboys” Zaf,

<sup>89</sup> I. Chambers, migrancy, culture, identity op.cit., p.23.

<sup>90</sup> M. Gillespie, Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change op.cit., p.5.

dressed in jeans, ten-gallon hat, and country and western shirt, knows differently. Rather like the “Arizona Jim” western stories in Jean Renoir’s The Crime Of Monsieur Lange (1935), the music and the image of the American West represent a site of potential emancipation, the open road or landscape signifying social mobility and escape from oppression. Thus the film opens with Zaf cycling down an empty stretch of road and past a billboard displaying an American cowboy. This imagery is a utopian resource which the band use to fuel fantasies of escaping from the racism and diminished horizons which dominate Britain. “This whole fucking shithole country’s too small” as Zaf bluntly puts it.

The film has a brilliant fantasy sequence which articulates these utopian aspirations and connects this appropriation of country and western with the “anti-capitalist aspects of black expressive culture” which Gilroy finds in various strands of Black music.<sup>91</sup> Here the collective dimensions of fantasy are retained by linking the fantasy with the band as a whole. The sequence begins at night as the band return from an unsuccessful evening at the “Rising Asian” talent contest. They cross an industrial wasteland, passing the abandoned Southall Meat Factory where the brothers’ father “came off the land and into this shithole”. Their father was ground down by the time and motion rhythm of modern industrialisation. Zaf describes how “they made a big man small.” As Gilroy notes, a critique of productivism, the labour process and the division of labour under capitalism, is a key core theme of Black music.

Having established the oppressive past and present from which a utopian escape is desired, the fantasy sequence really takes off when the band steal a police car. They transform it into an open top with a chainsaw, steal some guitars and head into the centre of town with the blue light flashing on top of the Sikh’s turban. The appropriation and transformation of a vehicle owned by an oppressive and racist state connects with another core theme in Black music which revolves “around a plea for the disassociation of law from domination.”<sup>92</sup> The geographical trajectory which the fantasy sequence maps is reminiscent of Hall’s argument about the utopian appeal of the metropolitan centre for the diasporic masses.

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<sup>91</sup> P. Gilroy, There Ain’t No Black In The Union Jack op.cit., pp.199-209.

<sup>92</sup> P. Gilroy, *ibid*, p.199.



“If you come from the sticks, the colonial sticks, where you really want to live is right on Eros Statue in Piccadilly Circus. You don’t want to go and live in someone else’s metropolitan sticks. You want to go right to the centre of the hub of the world.”<sup>93</sup>

Here the movement is from the suburban sticks into Leicester Square where the band perform to and attract a large appreciative crowd. The song, called “I ain’t ever Satisfied” plays across the fantasy sequence, testifying to both the material realities which frustrate satisfaction and the utopian possibilities of both music and the musical as a cinematic genre.<sup>94</sup>

As with Bhaji On The Beach the different definitions and dynamics associated with the diaspora are mapped onto generational differences. Avtah Brah, argues that the concept of the diaspora inscribes “*a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins*” (original emphasis).<sup>95</sup> For the band and their manager, Jagdeep, who drives a convertible American saloon with buffalo horns strapped to the front grill, America represents precisely this homing desire. Jagdeep’s ambition is to die in Beverly Hills. Zaf’s mother also claims that she does not want to die in Britain, but she wishes to return ‘home’ to Pakistan, which she conceives precisely in terms of fixed origins. These are two very different journeys, very different dissatisfactions with Britain and very different proposed solutions. The tension is caught as Zaf, in country and western clothing, stands in the lounge framed in a low angle shot with a large portrait of President Zia, the former dictator, dominating the background. Eventually his mother sells the home, claiming that she wants to return to her “own kind” and lamenting the cultural “confusion” which has afflicted her sons. They in turn reject her pleas to return with her to Pakistan.

In the meantime, the band’s fortunes are finally changing. The film has mobilised a potential romance between Zaf and an Asian women, Rifat, married to a white mini cab operator who is prone to physically abusing her. Rifat leaves her husband and joins the band as a singer. With her now fronting the band, their fortunes change and they are well received at an

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<sup>93</sup> S. Hall, “The Local and the Global” op.cit., p.24.

<sup>94</sup> R. Dyer, “Entertainment and Utopia” in Movies and Methods Vol.2 (ed) B. Nichols, University of California Press, 1985.

<sup>95</sup> A. Brah, “Cartographies of diaspora” op.cit., pp.192-3.

Irish pub which called them in at the last moment after their regular band is arrested by the anti-terrorist squad. From there, the band go into a recording studio and then with the demo tape, they get an appointment with the American owned country and western music company, Wild West. Crucially, just as in Bhaji On The Beach, the heterosexual romance is not allowed to dominate the more collective story being told, as it is in the gendered travels discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, although Rifat and Zaf do, as expected, end up in bed with each other, it is, rather unexpectedly, short lived. Rifat declares she wants Zaf as a friend, not a lover. This is crucial because it facilitates the key political point which the film ends on.

Invited to Wild West on the strength of their demo tape, the executive in a Stetson changes his tune when he actually sees the band. It is at this point that we and they learn that cultural hybridity takes place within certain material contexts. The executive, Hank Goldstein and his partner, Yehudi (neither of them, obviously 'pure' Texans, whatever that may be) start to talk about marketing and saleability and can see no future for an Asian country and western band in Texas. The commodification of music, the division between cultural producers and owners of the means of production suddenly and abruptly reminds us that while deterritorialization can in principle bring together any set of cultural combinations, the gate keepers have to be satisfied of its exchange value. But then Hank and Yehudi close in on Rifat, saying that although she has the "dusky looks" they can do something for her. Zaf persuades her to sign a contract with Wild West, while the band cash in the money gained from selling the house and buy their tickets to Nashville, where, we can assume, their utopian hopes of transcending the racist limitations of Britain, may not be entirely satisfied.

## **Conclusion**

We have seen that the conceptualisation of diaspora within Black and Asian cultural theory and cinematic practice pulls in two very different directions. There is the ontological essentialist orientation, which spatially involves a return "home" and temporally a freezing of time or projection back into the past. This position closely parallels the chronotope of the organic community. The other position, which has been much more

attractive to cultural producers and theorists, conceives the diaspora spatially as an ongoing process of dispersion and settlement, in which identity is always already hybrid, plural, shifting, mixing and involved in crossing cultural borders and boundaries. Although often cast within the terms of the postmodern, we can see how these twin conceptualisations can be mapped onto the tradition/modernity couplet which I have been using to explore white ethnicities. Diaspora as the search for lost authentic traditions and diaspora as contingency and change corresponds closely with Benjamin's analysis of the commodity form as an oscillation between endless repetition and novelty. At the level of cultural theory, novelty and the conception of time as a *tabula rasa* which it implies, is evident, I suggested, in Hall's discussion of the way the subject has been conceived. The classic individualist, the sociological vision and the postmodern, are conceived in a linear history of clean breaks, where each stage leaves the previous one behind. In terms of social space, the emphasis on novelty in Appadurai's analysis, makes all socio-historical configurations unpredictable and transient. We returned to Hall to find that the same theoretical biases applied to Black politics meant the end of the Black subject and the explosion of "new ethnicities", with all the problems that brings for identifying common interests and indeed, common enemies. As Avtāh Brah notes:

"For several hundred years now a global economic system has been in the making. It evolved out of the transatlantic trade in human beings, it flourished during the Industrial Revolution, it has been nurtured by colonialism and imperialism, and now it has achieved a new vitality in this age of microchip technology and multinational corporations. It is a system that has created lasting inequalities, both within nations and between nations. All our fates are linked within this system, but our precise position depends on a multiplicity of factors..."<sup>96</sup>

It is this dilemma which theory has to grasp, this tension between the generalisation of interests which the expansion of commodity relations globally produces, so that indeed, all our fates are interlinked, and the other dynamic of commodity relations which produces a multiplicity of positions within this totality. Benjamin's philosophy of history, premised as it is on

<sup>96</sup> A. Brah, *Cartographies of diaspora* op.cit., p.84.

the tension between novelty and repetition inscribed into the commodity form, is, I have suggested, a starting point for grasping both horns of the dilemma, in time and space. I have argued that the link between the particularity of a position and the generality of class interest can only be grasped if we reintroduce the term 'consciousness' as a mediating term. This is the hinge on which the two can swing. This requires theorising class as a dichotomy, voided of any *necessary* cultural particularity and an understanding of class struggle as the struggle over surplus value, its generation, reinvestment and institutional conditions of reproduction. On the other side of the hinge, various particularities can once more be understood historically and materially: culture and the media take up their important role in fostering identity and potentially, a broader consciousness, without aestheticising the real to the extent that questions of power are reduced to a constantly shifting terrain of cultural interaction.

I have attempted to discuss two British Asian films as a way of both illustrating these theoretical debates while according them their own cinematic specificity. The strength of these films are numerous: they display a sophisticated, self reflexive, critical engagement with popular culture; they have an assured grasp of the fluidities of identity and subjectivity, breaking with the overpowering cloying nostalgia which grips so much British cinema. Like other Black British films they display what John Hill describes as an "expanded sense of 'Britishness'...but also...sensitivity to social differences...within an identifiably and specifically British context."

<sup>97</sup> Both films play with the realist/fantasy aesthetics which have been so important to British film culture. In Bhaji On The Beach, fantasy is not equated with transgressive desire, but with the reality principle. The film explores the investments people have in the fantasy of cultural purity and tradition. In Wild West, a rather different conception of fantasy is mobilised. Here it is yoked to cultural transgression and utopian hope. Yet both films ground these explorations of subjectivity and identification, within "realist" frameworks which address racism, sexism, and class relations within a specifically British context.

The weakness of these films, like the theories I have discussed, lie along temporal and spatial axes. In terms of space, the films are only able to

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<sup>97</sup> J. Hill, "The Issue Of National Cinema And British Film Production" in New Questions of British Cinema (ed) D. Petrie, BFI, 1992, p.16.

allude or briefly glimpse the solidarities necessary to address unequal concentrations of power. In terms of time, they live in the present, equating all memory, all tradition, with nostalgia, which is radically disabling. When in Wild West Zaf briefly remembers his father, his brother could almost be speaking for the film when he asks him not to talk about his father, as if it is too painful to bear. One may recall Benjamin's advice on this matter of memory:

"Social Democracy thought fit to assign to the working class the role of the redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This training made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren." <sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> W. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in Illuminations Pimlico Press, 1999, p.252.

# **European Travels**

"... at the 11th hour, the investors sent their insurance guarantor to check the viability of the Arctic location... "The helicopter pilot warned us there might be no light at all, half an hour at midday if we were lucky. We set off in a blinding snowstorm. The pilot couldn't see a thing. But when a ghostly mauve light suddenly appeared from under the horizon it was utterly magical and weird. The guarantor clutched his head in what I took to be a fit of nausea, but it was emotion. He said, 'Yes! It's obvious to me now. That's what Finbar's looking for - oblivion!'"...What thrilled Clayton as much as the news that she had secured the financing was that the man in the suit understood Finbar's quest, his need for "a sense of elsewhere - oblivion, the Arctic, the image of the *tabula rasa* on which to start out all over again." " 1

"European film is fascinated by time, and shaped by a desire to return to the past, by an almost obsessive need to explore and interrogate memory and the process of remembering, apparently convinced that there in may be found the key to present identity." 2

## Introduction

Travel is obviously a major *raison d'être* of the co-production, bringing characters from different parts of Europe and beyond into contact with one another just as the co-production brings together producers and acting talent from different countries. Journey Of Hope (Xavier Koller, 1992) for example is a Turkish, Italian and Swiss co-production which also had Channel Four money in it. The film tells the story of Turkish peasants trying to find illegal passage into Europe in search of the 'good life.'

Since this study has not been concerned to locate British cinema in a hermetically sealed national culture, it is fitting and congruent with my methodology that neither of the two co-productions I have chosen to discuss in this chapter are in any straightforward sense, British. Indeed the historical context in which they will be discussed amounts to the political and economic institutionalisation of globalizing tendencies: namely European integration.

In production terms, The Name Of The Rose is a German, French and Italian co-production (the latter two have a history of cinematic collaboration) but the film draws on images of Britishness which are quite crucial to its ideological operations. Firstly, Sean Connery's Holmsian

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<sup>1</sup> M. McFadyean, Interview with Sue Clayton, The Guardian 2 October 14th, 1998, pp.14-15.

<sup>2</sup> W. Everett, "Timetravel and European film" in European Identity In Cinema (ed) W. Everett, Intellect Books, Exeter, 1996, p.103.

detective, Brother William of Baskerville travels into Europe to provide the reference point for the film's valorisation of proto-scientific, Enlightenment rationality. Secondly, Connery's Brother William provides the film with its centrist politics. Drawing on associations of moderation and evolution in British politics, Brother William is the mid-point between the extremes at war in the film. The Church hierarchy on the one hand, with their attempts to legitimise their own wealth and the proto-socialist monastic order, the Dolcenites, attempting to bring the Church closer to the poor by eliminating its wealth - and prepared to engage in political violence to achieve its goal. Of the Dolcenites, Brother William remarks to Adso that "the step between ecstatic vision and sinful frenzy is all too brief." At the same time, his pursuit of knowledge and his rational outlook brings him into conflict with the Church establishment. This conflict (rationalism Vs. superstition) is distinctly less explosive politically for the contemporary audience than the class politics engaged in by the Dolcenites and which Brother William's discourse attempts (not all that convincingly) to define and contain.

If The Name Of The Rose fits very nicely into the supranational project of pan-Europeanism which globalisation has encouraged, The Disappearance Of Finbar on the other hand, with its travels to the peripheral space of Lapland, fits into the segmentation and subdivisions which are going on 'below' national identity.<sup>3</sup> The Disappearance Of Finbar is a British film in a financial and production sense only. The film's major investor was Channel Four, the main production company was British and the director, Sue Clayton is also British. The story begins in Ireland and concerns itself with the disappearance of Finbar from a housing estate and the effect this has on the community. Finbar cannot be forgotten about even though he himself has apparently forgotten about them. Three years later, a pop video is made about Finbar's disappearance and it is this example of travelling culture which motivates Finbar to phone his friend Danny and tell him that the video was rubbish and that they should all just try and forget about him. But contacting Danny produces the opposite effect and Danny leaves for Sweden in his search for Finbar.

Arriving in Stockholm, he finds that Finbar has already left and so he heads

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<sup>3</sup> I. Aitkin, "Current problems in the study of European cinema and the role of questions on cultural identity," in European Identity In Cinema (ed) W. Everett, op.cit., p.78.



north, tracking him eventually to Lapland. Apart from the motif of travel, or rather, because of it, the film's relevance to this project lies in its meditation on two conceptualisations of time and space which I have argued are central to capitalist modernity. Finbar and Danny represent two sides of modernity which do not add up: (in space) community and separation, (in time) continuity and rupture. The difficulty of marrying these torn halves is symptomatically present in the homoerotic hints of unconsummated desire between Danny and Finbar.

In many ways The Disappearance of Finbar is a textbook example of a co-production and one which makes use of the newly installed mechanisms to facilitate European co-operation. For this reason I have chosen to use the film as a case study of the process of production for a particular production paradigm. In chapter one I engaged with the industrial context of The Private Life Of Henry VIII - in part because this revealed something of its *particular* economic conditions of existence, but also because those conditions have a more *general* relevance concerning the subordination of the British film industry to Hollywood. In this chapter I return to the question of industrial infrastructure in order to pick up this theme of economic domination and competition. This provides retrospectively, some sense of the economic context in which the films discussed in chapters three, four and five, have been made, but, more importantly it looks to the future of British/European cinema as it struggles to survive in the shadow of Hollywood. The return to questions of industry also reminds us that the philosophical, cultural and political issues that I have been engaging with, and will continue to engage with in the context of European identity, cannot be separated from the material determinants impinging on the production and consumption of films.

Using The Disappearance of Finbar as a case study has led me to introduce a new methodological strategy into the study. This involved interviewing both the film's British producer (Martin Bruce-Clayton) and its director (Sue Clayton, no relation) in order to piece together the production process in some detail. This raises questions of authorship, motivations and agency and the status we give to the self reflections of those involved in the very processes which we seek to understand.

Clearly there is a danger here of reducing meanings and motivations to individual perspectives and biographies which simply reproduces the worst aspects of auteurism. On the other hand, the empirical data generated by interviews with key participants in the production process, provides the researcher with a wealth of information and potentially real insights into a process academics are often rather ignorant of. The way to handle such empirical data it seems to me is to try and integrate motivations, agency, and individual perspectives into the wider institutional structures and cultural dynamics in operation, using these objective phenomena (i.e. existing independent of our will) as a way of assessing the weight, merit and contradictions of the empirical evidence gathered by interview. As Tulloch notes, drawing on the work of Anthony Giddens, the cultural producer, like all human subjects, must be accredited with some sense of agency. They do not simply, unconsciously conform to their given structures and uncritically reproduce their cultures. To varying degrees, 'authors' (producers, directors, etc) can "reflexively monitor their conduct, and are *partially aware* of the conditions of their behaviour." <sup>4</sup>

It is precisely these wider structures which this chapter is largely devoted to mapping. At the cultural level I argue for a double critique. On the one hand we must call into question the arrogance, the complacency, the assumptions and self delusions involved in an uncritical celebration of Europe as the source and guarantor of Enlightenment ideals. On the other hand (and much less fashionable) we must call into question the mirror image of this position, common amongst the western intelligentsia, a position that can best be described as post-Enlightenment liberalism.

At the level of economics it is important to fasten onto the salient structural inequalities effecting the industry. The ability of intellectuals to call such concentrated economic power into question has been inhibited because of a period of questioning and self interrogation concerning the methods used to explain cultural imperialism, national culture, high Vs. low culture and the whole basis of cultural evaluation. It seems to me that it should be possible to combine interrogation on all these fronts without losing sight of the desirability of 'local' access to the means of cultural production and audiences.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Tulloch, Television Drama, Agency, Audience and Myth Routledge, London, 1990, p.11.

## **Hollywood: the economics of domination**

It is important to stress that my analysis is focused on the structural, enduring features of the film industry. The empirical figures, the changing policy initiatives, the up and downs of the industry, the mergers, the new technologies, all testify to a constantly protean environment. I am not concerned to give a detailed chronological survey of that environment. Rather I want to illuminate the persistent, obdurate, structural characteristics of the system, noting how novelty and change is integrated into these repetitive dynamics. With this in mind we can begin by identifying a number of economic reasons for Hollywood's global domination of the industry.

a) *It is a hugely well capitalised industry.* The size of the American home market and the fact that it is dominated by a small cartel of large corporations. This internal domination provides the launchpad for global domination with expensive products which can be sold cheaply abroad, undercutting competitors. Thus the US film industry accounts for 74% of worldwide film production investment.<sup>5</sup> The shift of capital into the culture industries is exemplified in the course charted by Gulf and Western. This conglomerate which had interests in sugar, zinc, fertiliser, real estate, etc, acquired Paramount in 1966. By the 1980s it was shedding its interests in manufacturing, property and agriculture to concentrate on becoming a major player in the culture industries: in effect, Paramount, once just a small corner of a multinational, had absorbed Gulf and Western.<sup>6</sup>

Hollywood majors are vertically integrated and horizontally integrated: they have interests in property, theme parks, television, video, satellite, retail outlets, music, book publishing, etc. This allows economies of scale, cross subsidy, spreading of risk, cross promotion of products, and substantially raises the barriers of entry into the market. As Garnham notes, "it is now necessary to be large enough to have a significant stake across a whole range of leisure markets."<sup>7</sup> For example, marketing spinoffs for Batman (Tim Burton, 1989) made an estimated \$1 billion from merchandising, four

<sup>5</sup> Screen Digest, June 1995, p.131.

<sup>6</sup> T. Balio, "Adjusting To The New Global Economy: Hollywood in the 1990s" in Film Policy International, National and Regional Perspectives, (ed) A. Moran, Routledge, London, 1996, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> N. Garnham, "The Economic of the US Motion Picture Industry" in Capitalism And Communication: Global Culture and the Economics of Information Sage, London, 1990, p.202.

times box-office takings, while Malcolm X took \$100 million in X products in the U.S. alone. <sup>8</sup>

b) *Rising production costs*. This is a deliberate and long term strategy within the industry to squeeze out competitors. Escalating production costs are another way of raising barriers to successful entry into the market. Average production costs for Hollywood films rose from \$9 million in 1980 to \$24 million in 1989. <sup>9</sup>

c) *Marketing*. Huge promotion and advertising campaigns running into many millions of dollars help to make smaller competitors virtually invisible to consumers. The average promotional budget for a British film is currently around £250,000-300,000 <sup>10</sup>

d) *Volume*. Many Hollywood films do not break even but the few successes (re)cover the costs of the rest.

e) *Poaching*. The size of the industry and the opportunities it offers for regular and well remunerated work means that Hollywood sucks up talent from around the world. <sup>11</sup>

f) *Distribution*. A worldwide distribution system is, as Garnham notes, the key to Hollywood's long term success. For it is distribution which links production to exhibition. Since the highest investment in the making of the film commodity goes into the original negative, multiple prints are marginal extra costs rewarded many times over by massively increasing the exchange value of the commodity through wide exposure to as many people as possible. <sup>12</sup> Maintaining a worldwide distribution network is expensive however "(approximately \$20 million per year currently [1979]), thus barriers to entry are high." <sup>13</sup>

g) *The Superpower State*. Hollywood has the enthusiastic backing of the

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<sup>8</sup> The Observer, 20.6.93, p.53.

<sup>9</sup> T. Balio, op.cit., p.24.

<sup>10</sup> A. Pulver, The Guardian 2 July 24th, 1998, p.5.

<sup>11</sup> L. Friedman, (ed) British Cinema And Thatcherism University College London Press, London, 1993, p.2 for a list of British talent that has sought regular employment in Hollywood.

<sup>12</sup> N. Garnham, op.cit., p.183.

<sup>13</sup> N. Garnham, ibid, p.193.

American state, which as a superpower has enormous economic leverage (in terms of trade and loans) over other countries. After the Second World War, Hollywood's Motion Picture Export Agency referred to itself as the "little State Department" so intertwined was it with US foreign policy and ideology.<sup>14</sup> The world film industry generates revenues of about £30 billion,<sup>15</sup> so the stakes are high. France expelled two CIA agents when they were found trying to gather information on the strength of the French bargaining position at the GATT talks. Given that the unequal trade flows are self evident, systemic and long term, we cannot underestimate the role of *realpolitik* in the quietest acceptance by governments around the world to this domination.

h) *Ancillary Markets*. The growth of the video market has produced a dramatic new revenue stream but has been dominated by Hollywood. Only 4.6% of video rentals in 1991 were UK releases.<sup>16</sup> In 1983, revenues from video for the major Hollywood corporations on both their domestic and foreign markets were worth only \$750 million. By 1988, they were worth \$3,725 million. Worldwide sales to foreign television had also increased in value from \$125 million to \$550 million over the same period, indicating increased penetration of foreign television markets.<sup>17</sup> While revenues from cinema are more or less static, Hollywood will fight to retain its domination over the cinema exhibition circuits because only cinema generates the high profile marketing and publicity of a film which means that when it is sold into other markets (video, television) its high market profile increases its exchange value. This forging of what John Ellis calls the "narrative image" of a film, its cluster of expectations and enigmas, means that in the future, cinema could "be preserved as a loss-making arena for promotion of individual films which will make their real profits in other arenas."<sup>18</sup>

## **The UK**

The domination of the British market by Hollywood has been exacerbated by the fact that Britain is underscreened. France for example has twice as

<sup>14</sup> T. Miller, "The Crime Of Monsieur Lang, GATT, the screen and the new international division of cultural labour" in *Film Policy* op.cit., p.76.

<sup>15</sup> L. Buckingham, *The Guardian*, 19th Oct, 1996, p.26.

<sup>16</sup> J. Hill, "British Film Policy" in *Film Policy* op.cit., p. 107.

<sup>17</sup> N. Garnham, op.cit., p.205.

<sup>18</sup> J. Ellis, *Visible Fictions, Cinema, Television, Video* Routledge, London, 1992, p.35.

many screens. A multiplex building programme worth £560m built up the number of screens in the late 1980s from a low base. However, this investment was mostly American. As one commentator noted, "[t]he promise of wider choices, regularly made by the multiplex owners before they were built, has not been kept."<sup>19</sup> The multiplexes increased the number of people watching films in cinemas, from a low point of 55m in 1984 to 123 in 1996.<sup>20</sup> Unsurprisingly though, audiences are seeing more American films.

Increased direct investment and ownership in the exhibition sector is reinforced by Hollywood's domination of distribution. The Hollywood majors, UIP, Buena Vista, Fox, Warners and Columbia TriStar took 77.5% of UK box office takings in 1995. Two major 'independents' Rank and Entertainment took 18.6%. Given that these 'independents' are tied to American owned suppliers, they also generally deliver American product. Twenty three independent distributors were left fighting over the remaining 3.9% of the market. Only three of them averaged over £100,000 in box office takings per movie. UIP's average per film was £4.24 million.<sup>21</sup> In 1996, UK, UK co-productions and all other films *other than* US funded films, took together a mere 8.22% of box office takings. The rest went west.<sup>22</sup>

Is this domination due to the fact that the British cannot make popular films? The Full Monty is an instructive example. It made £26.8 m in 8 weeks. Culturally it is clearly a British film. In terms of storyline, style and acting it is in the tradition of British *television* drama,<sup>23</sup> which informs (detrimentally some would argue)<sup>24</sup> so much British cinema. It was a success though because it was distributed by Murdoch's C20th Fox and given a 300 print distribution in the UK.<sup>25</sup> By contrast The Disappearance of Finbar had six prints in circulation for its independent distribution.<sup>26</sup> Brassed Off similar in theme to The Full Monty but a much more complex film in terms of how it asks the audience to respond and a much more politically angry film, had a minimal US distribution. While controlling the

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<sup>19</sup> D. Malcom, The Guardian 2 August 5th, 1993, p.5.

<sup>20</sup> D. Putnam, The Guardian 2 July 5th 1997, p.5.

<sup>21</sup> P. Keighron, The Pact Magazine Issue 50, March, 1996, p.10.

<sup>22</sup> D. Glaister, The Guardian February 10th, 1998, p.15.

<sup>23</sup> E. Forrest, The Guardian 2 October 27th, 1997, p.5.

<sup>24</sup> A. Parker, The Guardian 2 October 27th, 1997, pp.8-9.

<sup>25</sup> D. Glaister, The Guardian February 10th 1998, p.15.

<sup>26</sup> M. Bruce-Clayton, interviewed by the author on November 5th, 1998.

means of distribution cannot guarantee success, without access to audiences one can guarantee that even the possibility of success is out of the question.

The structural weakness of the British film industry means that companies are posed with an insoluble dilemma. They can choose to stay small and creatively ambitious and resist the lure of economic expansion: but in that case, small, far from being beautiful, is weak, vulnerable and insecure. Alternatively, they can try and expand economically, and thereby expand their leverage in the marketplace. But here too there are dangers. The structural weaknesses of the British film industry means that expanding production makes the producers exceptionally prone to the classic cyclical patterns of capitalist industry: boom turns to bust. Expansion of output in turn requires increased borrowing from the banks. However, producers can quickly overstretch themselves. One or two difficulties can have a knock-on cumulative effect. The levers to rescue the company with a product successful at the box office (control of distribution) are not in their control. From there the company experiences a 'credit crunch'; the banks pull out and the receivers are called in. This was the story of Korda in the 1930s and it was also the story of Palace Pictures in the early 1990s.<sup>27</sup>

Contrary to popular opinion, ploughing money into the production side of British cinema is not and never has been the main problem. Certainly the City has been fickle in its relations with the industry (although arguably no more short termist than British capitalism is generally) but the real problem, and indeed the real source of City nervousness, is in distribution and exhibition - which is dominated now, as it was in the late 1920s and 30s, by the Hollywood majors. The recent channelling of money from the national lottery shows that it is relatively straight forward to devise a system that pours money into production (although exactly who gets the money is always open to controversy).<sup>28</sup> But unless the unequal power and control in distribution and therefore unequal access to exhibition is addressed, British cinema will be perennially characterised by short lived success and painful contractions.

Although one commentator noted of French protectionist measures that

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<sup>27</sup> Time Out, November 4-11, 1992, pp.20-22.

<sup>28</sup> A. Pulver, The Guardian 2 July 24th, 1998, pp.4-7.

trying to halt the “Godzilla-isation of French cinemagoing” was like trying to catch water, France is far less dominated by Hollywood than Britain. In 1997, 53.8% of films shown were American, 34.5% French and 11.7% other.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, the Conservatives were intent on abandoning the film industry to the tender mercies of the very unfree market. Quotas requiring distributors and exhibitors to handle a proportion of British films, dating back to the 1927 Cinematograph Act, were axed in 1983. The Conservative budget of 1985 withdrew tax incentives, terminated the Eady Levy, shut down the NFFC, and replaced it with British Screen, which despite some notable successes, is funded by private capital and so has proved sensitive to economic downturns. None of the existing arrangements were working particularly well in part because they had been set up many decades previously. However, instead of devising new mechanisms appropriate to present circumstances, the Conservatives simply abolished state support.<sup>30</sup>

### **European Cinema: the political context**

The drive towards political and economic union has its modern roots in the post-war Treaty Of Rome (1957). The goal of convergence in terms of laws, politics and economics and the removal of internal barriers to the free flow of goods, services and capital within Europe accelerated decisively in the 1980s. This had a double aim: to compete globally with those outside Europe and to bind Europe internally after centuries of war and conflict. The European Commission’s President Jacques Delors (who became something of a folk-devil for Eurosceptics) was an important figure driving the integrationist agenda during the 1980s (later to be replaced by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl). The 1987 Single European Act ushered in the ambition towards a Single European Market by 1992.<sup>31</sup> This timetable proved too ambitious. The 1990s has seen the goal of political and economic union oscillate violently between being an apparent inevitability, to it almost collapsing as resistance was mounted to it, at least on the terms of its initial formulation which was, essentially, a bankers Europe. In referendums, demonstrations, and strikes, - the epicentre of which has been, characteristically, France, people challenged the domination of the

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<sup>29</sup> S. Jeffrie, *The Guardian*, July 24th, 1998, p.15.

<sup>30</sup> J. Hill, “British Film Policy” in *Film Policy, International, National and Regional Perspectives* (ed) A. Moran, 1996, pp.101-113.

<sup>31</sup> K-D. Borchardt, *European Integration: The origins and growth of the European Union* Luxembourg, 1995.



bankers agenda.<sup>32</sup> Now, political and economic integration once more appears to be inevitable, but the terms of integration have shifted a little and to some extent the question of social justice has been placed on the agenda. These wider questions concerning what kind of Europe the Europe of the future is to be, the tensions between economic and social (or cultural) agendas has been and will be crucial for the shape of European cinema.

### **European Cinema: an economic challenge to Hollywood?**

The goal of creating “a unified economic territory undivided by either customs or trade barriers”<sup>33</sup> holds out the prospect of creating a larger market for films than the one which has sustained Hollywood’s global domination. On the other hand, since the Treaty Of Rome enshrines, as Buscombe notes, “a commitment to the doctrines of the free market”<sup>34</sup> integration may just as easily facilitate Hollywood’s complete domination of European cinema. It all depends on whether one believes that the free market is always free so long as state interference is kept to a minimum or whether one believes that the market itself, with its monopolistic tendencies, may produce a market that is substantially unfree.

It was not only Hollywood that was the site of mergers, acquisitions and rapidly concentrating economic power, during the 1980s. Within Europe too, cross-media ownership was accelerating, making media moguls of enormous influence out of Rupert Murdoch in the UK, Robert Hersant in France, Silvio Berlusconi in Italy and the media conglomerate Bertelsmann in Germany.<sup>35</sup> These private interests, to say nothing of the advertising industry,<sup>36</sup> had a vested interest in undermining the public service broadcasting systems across Europe as the prerequisite for constructing new television markets. At the European level, for some political and policymaking elites, commercial broadcasting was associated with a pan-European culture suitable to European integration, while public service

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<sup>32</sup> P. Bourdieu, Acts of Resistance Polity Press, London, 1998.

<sup>33</sup> K-D. Borchardt, European Integration op.cit., p.34.

<sup>34</sup> E. Buscombe, “Coca-Cola Satellites? Hollywood and the Deregulation of European Television” in Hollywood In The Age Of Television (ed) T. Balio, Unwin Hyman, Boston, 1990, p.400.

<sup>35</sup> J. Tunstall and M. Palmer, Media Moguls Routledge, London, 1991.

<sup>36</sup> T. O’Malley, Closedown? The BBC And Government Broadcasting Policy, 1979-1992 Pluto Press, London, 1994, pp.22-30.

broadcasting was associated with entrenched national political and cultural structures which it was felt, inhibited the dream of integration.<sup>37</sup> There was anxiety however that new delivery technologies such as video, cable and satellite, would increase American media domination. The plan was to rush forward to European integration so that European companies could compete with American companies as soon as possible.

These debates about broadcasting certainly helped set the free market tone to much of the debates about the media in general and cinema in particular. However, from the beginning there were also countercurrents within the elites arguing for some level of protectionism, evident for example in the Television Without Frontiers (1984) document. The audio-visual media in the Single European Market (1988) in turn criticised the import quotas advocated by Television Without Frontiers.

“Quotas are definitely not an adequate method for the support of an industry. When adopted, they are evidence of an extreme weakness in the sector involved. As a remedy they are, in fact extreme.”<sup>38</sup>

This document, which is extraordinarily coy about American domination does in fact admit from whose perspective such measures would be “extreme”. “The USA put impressive pressure on Community institutions and on Member State authorities on this issue.”<sup>39</sup> These differences within Europe and between America and Europe came to a head towards the end of 1993 around the GATT talks. Here, those arguing for some form of protection for a production base within Europe and for cinema and other media being regarded as a cultural good, rallied. (The question of what arguments can and should be made concerning the ‘cultural’ dimension of film is something we will come to later).

## **GATT Crisis**

Hollywood’s success requires domination of foreign markets to the

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<sup>37</sup> J. Tunstall and M. Palmer, op.cit., p.23.

<sup>38</sup> European Commission, The audio-visual media in the Single European Market Luxembourg, 4/1988, p.38.

<sup>39</sup> European Commission, ibid.

detriment of local producers.<sup>40</sup> As Tunstall and Palmer note, “in the 1980s Hollywood finally eliminated all other national film industries as serious competitors.”<sup>41</sup> The 1960s and 1970s saw brief film renaissances from Italian, France, West Germany and the UK. In 1967, 220 films from these four countries entered the US. In 1987, the same 4 countries could only get 83 films into the US market.<sup>42</sup> Today, while Hollywood operates globally, 80% of films produced in Europe do not leave their country of origin.<sup>43</sup> In 1990, US exports to the EC were worth \$3,750 million while EC exports to the US were worth \$250 million. It is worth constellating this with a figure given in chapter one. In 1913, 32 million feet of film was exported from America. The figure had increased exponentially to 235 million feet by 1925.<sup>44</sup> Conversely, the US *imported* 16 million feet in 1913 but a mere 7 million by 1925.<sup>45</sup> Respectively, imports into North America went from 50% of exports to less than 3% of exports over the same period. The 1990 figures of trade flows in terms of dollars shows that the EC’s \$250 million is just 6.6% of the \$3,750 million the trade is worth for Hollywood. As Toby Millar notes: “Washington/Hollywood/New York preside over the most closed television and cinema space in world history.”<sup>46</sup>

Despite this, Hollywood, backed by the American state, were adamant that the cultural industries should be included within the terms of trade set out in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade talks. Essentially, GATT represents the institutional face of the cultural/political dynamic explored in previous chapters: the expansion of the principles of neo-liberalism and of commodification of every corner of social and economic life. If film were to be included in the GATT’s terms of trade, then that would outlaw any protectionist measures which countries adopted towards their own threatened film industries. What is extraordinary is that a battle about culture almost brought a gargantuan economic treaty, with little interest in the pressing issues of social justice and environmental protection, to its

<sup>40</sup> T. Balio, “Adjusting To The New Global Economy: Hollywood in the 1990s” in Film Policy op.cit., p.23.

<sup>41</sup> J. Tunstall and M. Palmer, op.cit., p.25.

<sup>42</sup> J. Tunstall and M. Palmer, op.cit., p.25.

<sup>43</sup> European Commission, The audio-visual media in the Single European Market op.cit., p.26.

<sup>44</sup> T.H. Guback, “Hollywood’s Interational Market” in The American Film Industry (ed) T.Balio, University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, 1985, p.465.

<sup>45</sup> T.H. Guback, *ibid*, p.468-469.

<sup>46</sup> T. Millar, “The Crime Of Monsieur Lang, GATT, the screen and the new international division of cultural labour”, op.cit., p.76.

knees.<sup>47</sup> The importance of culture at GATT reflects in part the shift in America from export of goods to 'exporters of textuality'.<sup>48</sup> By contrast, the stubbornness of French politicians in risking the wrath of the American state by defending what is for them an economically small industry, derives from a long history of state protection for cinema as a cultural good, and a recent vigorous (although not entirely successful) campaign by Jack Lang, Minister of Culture, to promote indigenous cultural production.<sup>49</sup>

Although the fight against GATT was presented by some as French chauvinism, it was widely supported across Europe's 12 member states by a petition of over 4000 artists, directors and producers.<sup>50</sup> The outcome of GATT was that culture industries were excluded from the free trade obligations of the treaty. That does not in itself guarantee that European film at national and supranational levels will achieve sufficient protection - only that it would not be illegal under the terms of international trading law, if they were to achieve such protection. Both sides agreed to disagree, both sides will regroup and engage again. It was a victory for neither side - more of a draw.

### **MEDIA/Eurimages**

Two programmes that might have been threatened by GATT are the MEDIA programme and Eurimages. The MEDIA programme is a raft of initiatives which aim to stimulate the European audio-visual sector, especially, cross-border projects. Between 1991 and 1995 it had a 200 million ECU budget to provide seeding capital across three areas: the economic and commercial training of producers and script development (routinely identified as a weakness in European films); distribution, via the European Film Distribution Office which also helps with the promotion and marketing of European films; and exhibition.<sup>51</sup>

Eurimages is a pan-European fund for direct investment in European

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<sup>47</sup> P. Lennon, *The Guardian* 12th November, 1993, p.30.

<sup>48</sup> T. Miller, *op.cit.*, p.74.

<sup>49</sup> S. Hayward, "State, culture and the cinema: Jack Lang's strategies for the French film industry" in *Screen*, 34 (4) 1993.

<sup>50</sup> J. Carvel, *The Guardian* 29.9.93, p.8.

<sup>51</sup> European Commission, *Media Programme* 5th edition, October, 1994.

multilateral co-productions, established in 1988 within the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. The fund comes from the subscription which member countries pay to join. Members include countries both inside the European Community but also outside, such as Turkey, Poland and Hungary. It has a cultural remit, seeking festival awards, critical praise and perceived contributions to cultural life from the films it funds. In particular Eurimages exists to facilitate new co-production networks, aiming in particular to bring companies from smaller film producing countries into contact with larger producer countries in order to foster audio-visual production in small markets. Eurimages also has a financial remit, taking seriously the repayment of interest free loans which it provides to film producers. UK participation in co-productions increased from 8 in 1990 to 32 in 1994,<sup>52</sup> a rise from just under 4% of total production in 1990 to just under 50% in 1994. In 1995, 34% of all UK films had Eurimage money. Another percentage of co-productions on top of that were made simply because Eurimage was there and provides a fall back position if money elsewhere dries up.<sup>53</sup> The UK joined Eurimages in 1993. However after a 3% cut in the Department of National Heritage's Budget,<sup>54</sup> Virginia Bottomly pulled out of Eurimages in November 1995. In just under three years it had paid £5.5 million to Eurimages, which had in turn invested £12.5 million in UK co-productions, helping to generate according to one estimate, £40 million worth of filmmaking activity.<sup>55</sup> The Disappearance of Finbar was one of the last British films to benefit from Eurimages funding.

Valuable as the MEDIA programme and Eurimages are, they are attempting to stimulate European filmmaking in a wider policy vacuum which has failed to address the structural inequalities and vested interests that have squeezed European cinema to the very margins of cultural life in Europe. Garnham quotes an industry analyst from the 1930s who argued that it was, "folly to believe that, no matter what developments take place in the industry, the American producers and distributors will be able to maintain as a mere matter of course, the commanding position which they at present possess." <sup>56</sup> It was believed that European wide production and

<sup>52</sup> Screen Digest, June, 1995, p.130.

<sup>53</sup> M. Most, Eyepiece vol.17, no.1, Feb/Mar 1996, p.21.

<sup>54</sup> M. Most, *ibid*, p.20.

<sup>55</sup> Sight and Sound, v.6, no.2, February 1996, p.5.

<sup>56</sup> N. Garnham, *op.cit.*, p.188.

distribution cartels, backed by European states, would use US access to European markets as a bargaining position to create more favourable terms of access to the US market.<sup>57</sup> Seventy years later, we are still waiting.

### **The Disappearance Of Finbar: case study of a co-production**

A case study helps us to explore one of the major conundrums of the study of the medium: how determinants at the point of production shape the types of films that are available.<sup>58</sup> As a production paradigm, co-productions can be distinguished from co-financing deals. The former involves a genuine input - although not necessarily equal in volume and weight - into the key factors which shape the film from pre-production to post-production. Co-financing involves financial contributions from more than one source, but beyond agreed contractual commitments, only one partner has a creative input across the production process.<sup>59</sup>

Co-productions between unequally sized markets raise questions of power and the extent to which such co-productions involve the overwhelming domination of one or two partners over a third.<sup>60</sup> Co-productions are culturally contentious as well as logistically difficult. Everett writes of "the inevitable watering down of differences and resulting blandness of these films."<sup>61</sup> The Disappearance of Finbar may tell half its story in Lapland and Stockholm, but it does not, as we shall see, contribute to Nordic aspirations to avoid an English language take over.<sup>62</sup>

A case study of the production process also raises the complex issue of authorship which remains a persistent and privileged term in European cinema.<sup>63</sup> Thus Channel Four told Sue Clayton to make a 'personal film' - and saw the project through-out as an art film. Whatever the limitations of

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<sup>57</sup> See also, A. Higson, " 'A Film League Of Nations': Gainsborough, Gaumont-British and 'Film Europe' " in Gainsborough Pictures (ed) P.Cook, Cassell, London, 1997.

<sup>58</sup> V. Porter, "European Co-production - Aesthetic and Cultural Implications" in European Cinema Conference (ed) S. Hayward, AMLC/Aston University, 1985, p.1.

<sup>59</sup> V. Porter, *ibid*, p.2.

<sup>60</sup> J. Tunstall and M.Palmer, Media Moguls *op.cit.*, pp.27-30.

<sup>61</sup> W. Everett, "Framing the fingerprints: a brief survey of European film" in European Identity In Cinema *op.cit.*, p.15.

<sup>62</sup> Everett, *ibid*, p.23.

<sup>63</sup> W. Everett, "European film and the quest for identity" European Identity In Cinema *op.cit.*, pp.9-10.

auteur theory as it was developed in the 1960s and however incomplete even a modified and reworked approach to the question of directorial agency would be *on its own*, authorship is clearly important in European cinema and has, as Elsaesser notes in relation to German art cinema,<sup>64</sup> institutional, material infrastructures to ensure that directors produce work that can be seen to bear the mark of some sort of authorial signature.

The Disappearance of Finbar derives from a script of a book by an Irish writer, Carl Lombard called The Disappearance of Rory Brophy.<sup>65</sup> The director Sue Clayton has a preference for working from novels but avoids English literary fiction which she feels is both dominated by middle class values and is too domestic in its orientation to translate into visually exciting cinema.<sup>66</sup> (We have seen that domesticity, from The Private Life Of Henry VIII, to Local Hero to Another Time, Another Place, is a recurrent trope of British cinema). The producers, a British company called First City, submitted Clayton's treatment of the story to the MEDIA programme's European Script Development Fund and the Irish Film Board. Both these organisations stumped up script development money which in turn augmented Channel Four's interest in the proposal. The film was to be shot both in Ireland and somewhere in Scandinavia. The Irish location was Tallaght. On the edge of Dublin it is one of the biggest housing estates in Europe. Sue Clayton:

"I was looking for a "anywhere" in Europe location. There was this idea that Europe was on the way to becoming lots of housing estates...places that aren't quite cities and aren't quite countryside. People's sense of identity in these places is ambiguous. They retain some of the old sense of community, but also they are losing it."<sup>67</sup>

An Irish company called Samson Films were brought on board which was crucial for accessing Ireland's Section 35 funding, i.e. the tax break, worth £160,000 to this film's overall budget. The Irish Film Board came up with £240,000 and £25,000 came from RTE as their license fee.

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<sup>64</sup> T. Elsaesser, New German Cinema, A History, BFI/Macmillan, London, 1989.

<sup>65</sup> The following information concerning the production process derives from an interview with Martin Bruce-Clayton on January 24th, 1997, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>66</sup> Sue Clayton, interviewed by the author on February 6th, 1997.

<sup>67</sup> Sue Clayton, interviewed February 6th, 1997.

First City then set about finding a Scandinavian partner. In doing this they had to weigh up logistical and financial factors. In financial terms, the Scandinavian countries do not have film industries of a comparable size to the UK's. During this period, the UK had 13.7% share of all films produced in Europe; Denmark had 2.7%, Finland and Norway 2.5%,<sup>68</sup> After initial enquiries, neither Norwegian or Finnish companies could provide the required capital, Nordisk, a Danish company were prepared to invest in the film and offer good facilities but it was felt that Copenhagen looked too much like a Northern European city rather than a Northern Scandinavian city which the director wanted. There was also the additional logistical factor that the location provide plenty of snow, which Denmark could not. For Sue Clayton, the location of Lapland that was eventually used was especially symbolic, since Lapland, like a United States Of Europe, is an imaginary country that has no formal existence. Instead, like the imagined Europe of the future it is a place where the borders of different countries intersect.<sup>69</sup>

A deal was finally made with Victoria Films in Sweden who started the ball rolling with Swedish television and other Scandinavian funds. For example £120,000 came from the Swedish Film Institute and a further a contribution from TV2, the main Danish broadcaster. There was also funding in kind from Lapland through the Midnight Sun Film Investors, who offered the use of facilities. In the end there were approximately 10 sources of cash. This included £300,000 from Eurimages, providing just under 10% of the film's overall budget, which is the average proportion of budget supplied by Eurimage.<sup>70</sup> In fact, because it costs money to communicate with overseas producers, involving as it does transport costs and translation fees, co-productions actually add about 10% to a film's budget. Therefore, Martin Bruce-Clayton argues, the money from Eurimage is not really a net gain, but a vital compensation for engaging in co-productions in the first place. The film's total budget was £3.3 million

One of the problems of having so many partners involved in such a project is that the film may be pulled in quite different directions according to the different backers' perceived audiences. For the director, Sue Clayton, this meant trying to reconcile several conflicting interests.

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<sup>68</sup> Screen Digest, June 1995, p.129.

<sup>69</sup> Sue Clayton, 6th February, 1997.

<sup>70</sup> Screen Digest, June 1995, p.136.



“We would have meetings where the different backers would say, make it faster, slower, shorter, longer, funnier, more serious, more elliptical, more straight forward, more linear, more Postmodern, and we’ll be back next Friday to see the next cut - and they’d all get back on their planes and I would just sit there and scream.” <sup>71</sup>

The Swedish Film Institute for example invested on the understanding that at least parts of the film would be in the Swedish language. Channel Four however subsequently refused to have any subtitles in the film - so the Swedish and Finnish language could only be used where it was obvious to English language speakers what the of the dialogue was, or alternatively, where humour is generated by the English language spectator sharing the Irish character’s bewilderment and confusion. Pandora, a French sales company that had invested £575,000 for European and Japanese distribution rights, were convinced that the film was a teen-movie and were concerned that First City do all they could to help market the film to adolescent girls. C4 however insisted that it was an adult art movie. Thus the film was originally scripted with the intention of starting in Sweden and having flashbacks to Ireland, but Pandora felt that this complex structure would be unintelligible to their idea of who the core audience was. “You could say” suggests Sue Clayton, “that the film was scripted for Channel Four and edited for Pandora.”

Such multiple voices, interests and pressures can make for a confused end product, the classic ‘Euro-pudding’ and the critical reception in some quarters to The Disappearance Of Finbar implied precisely this. <sup>72</sup>

European producers have been lobbying Eurimages to revise its guidelines and make bilateral co-productions eligible for funding. <sup>73</sup> Presently only co-productions with three or more producers can apply. One difficulty with the present rules is that the third partner is often very small and is unable to supply adequate finance, forcing the co-production to broaden still further the number of investors. All of which can make for a culturally and economically unwieldy operation. However, while a revision of the rules makes economic sense, it would cut against the cultural remit of Eurimages

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<sup>71</sup> Sue Clayton, 6th February, 1997.

<sup>72</sup> R. White, Sight and Sound November 1998, p.46.

<sup>73</sup> Screen International, n.1106.02, May 1997, p.8.

indigenous audio-visual production in countries and regions (such as Scandinavia) with very small industries and markets.

Funding, whether multiple or single in source, whether private or public, whether high budget or low budget, always brings with it, investor pressure and influence. Take Sue Clayton's experience whereby investor pressure led to the dropping of a key scene that would have helped make the link between Finbar's disappearance and the film's allegory of political and economic exile which is part of the hidden story of migration into Europe.<sup>74</sup> From Finbar's phone call, Danny learns that he is in Stockholm. The scene that proved contentious for the investors is as follows: Danny, looking for Finbar finds out where the migrant's quarter is. Now, in Stockholm, the migrants quarter is in a district on the edge of the city called Rinkeby. Here the displaced are ghettoised on mega-estates, where dozens of nationalities have come together and have formed informal structures like their own football teams. Danny goes to the fictional equivalent, telling anyone who will listen that his friend is "missing". A Moroccan asks him whether he's got a campaign and a poster, because, "all the missing are here." Meanwhile, a white racist is shouting in the market square at the immigrants telling them they are not really Swedish. The Moroccan meanwhile informs Danny that the Swedish authorities have made him watch all of Ingmar Bergman films. This neatly juxtaposes two common and contradictory European attitudes towards the outsider. On the one hand there is the attempt to absorb the outsider into what is thought to be a 'superior' western culture (Ingmar Bergman films in this case) and on the other, there is the declaration (via the market square racist) that they can never be really "one of us".

The investors however found this scene too blunt, detracting from the "magical realist" qualities of the film. Here the "fantasy" components of the film (the quest, idiosyncratic characters) are used by the investors to force an elision of the cognitive decodings around European racism which the film's "realist" project was trying to depict. This is a clear case of investor bullying. It raises very acutely the question of whether film is to be no more than a mode of regional boosterism or whether it can adopt a more critical interrogation of society. Given that it is precisely the migrants' story which is often cut out of the media, the pressure exerted on Clayton to leave this

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<sup>74</sup> Sue Clayton, interviewed on November 10th, 1998.

scene on the cutting room floor, has clear political ramifications.

Having negotiated a fraught production process, the low budget European co-production then has to fight to get decent distribution. This is made all the harder if the film does not have - as is likely in a low budget film - a star around which to hang the marketing of the film. However, The Disappearance Of Finbar was fortunate enough to have cast Jonathan Rhys Myers in the role of Finbar. Back in 1995-96 when the film was shot, Rhys Myers was an unknown actor, but subsequently starred in Velvet Goldmine and The Governess. The Disappearance Of Finbar was deliberately held over in the UK and released at the same time as these two films in an attempt to cash in on the publicity being generated around Rhys Myers as a rising star. Yet Channel Four had by that time decided not to distribute the film, a reflection less on The Disappearance Of Finbar than on a market in which it is desperately difficult to give a quirky, non-generic film much of a chance. However, Channel Four did contribute money to its independent distribution by Robins Cinemas, a tiny company which owns the Prince Charles cinema in Leicester Square, the film's main venue in London.<sup>75</sup>

### **European Cinema: a cultural challenge to Hollywood?**

When it comes to British government film policy across the decades, the implicit, largely unstated and unexamined cultural implications inscribed into the policies, tend to be a confused mix of crude nationalism and unfeasible commercial ambitions. The same has been true of much of the debate concerning a European film industry and culture. The kind of explicit debate about the cultural values, meanings and identities (the kind for example which took place before and informed the setting up of Channel Four) in short, what and who a British or European cinema would be for and what it would do, has been noticeable by its absence.

A document such as A fresh boost for culture in the European Community<sup>76</sup> is similarly characterised by this confusion of conservative pan-Europeanism and commercial banality. The former simply sees culture as a form of regional boosterism, propagandising on behalf of and trying to

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<sup>75</sup> M. Bruce-Clayton, interviewed by the author on November 5th, 1998.

<sup>76</sup> European Commission, A fresh boost for culture in the European Community, EC supplement. 4/87, 1988, Luxembourg.

secure the popular support necessary for the “considerable changes...in living conditions” which integration will bring. <sup>77</sup> The document waxes lyrical about European culture (“a shared pluralistic humanism based on democracy, justice and freedom”) <sup>78</sup> and seems ripe for Benjamin’s riposte that “[t]here is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.” <sup>79</sup> At the national level, some of the best European cinema has been attacked by those who thought that film should ‘promote’ the image(s) of the nation rather than document the barbarism say of poverty and unemployment. Thus Italian Neo-Realism met with the hostility of powerful political and Church elites and in 1949 a law was passed preventing the export of films which showed a ‘negative’ picture of Italy. <sup>80</sup> Decades later, Norman Stone, the Thatcherite historian, launched an attack on such “worthless and insulting” films as Sammy and Rosie Get Laid, and The Last Of England. <sup>81</sup> because they were angry testaments to the social barbarism of Britain under Thatcherism. Whatever one thinks of the individual examples, the point is the principle at stake: should film merely be celebratory (and if so, what should it celebrate) or should film also have a critical, questioning role?

Conceptions of Europeaness currently circulating within policy makers and advisors appears to be no more than the conservative national version of identity scaled up to a supranational level. As Morley and Robins note:

“The language of official Euro-culture is significant: it is the language of cohesion, community, unity, integration, security. What is invoked, though never avowed, is the possibility of a new European order defined by a clear sense of its own coherence, and integrity. “ <sup>82</sup>

The problem with the official Euro-culture is that it does not admit to the problematic differences within Europe. Morley and Robins rightly identify

<sup>77</sup> A fresh boost for culture in the European Community , ibid, pp.5-6.

<sup>78</sup> A fresh boost for culture in the European Community , ibid, p.5.

<sup>79</sup> W. Benjamin, “Theses On The Philosophy Of History” in Illuminations Pimlico Press, 1999, p.248.

<sup>80</sup> M. Marcus, Italian Film In The Light Of Neo Realism, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1986.

<sup>81</sup> N. Stone, “Through A Lens Darkly” in Black Film, British Cinema (ed) K. Mercer, ICA, 7, 1988, pp.22-24.

<sup>82</sup> D. Morley and K. Robins, Spaces of Identity, global media, electronic landscapes and cultural boundaries Routledge, London, 1995, p.23.

the conservative thrust of this discourse on European culture. It is an image of identity which is fairly assured of its grand achievements, confident in its own righteousness, certain of the attachments of its citizens to its monologic ideals and equally dogmatic as to who belongs and who does not belong to this identity. The boosterism which this conservatism reduces culture to, is reinforced by the commercial ambitions for culture which are the other face of this approach to identity. Thus much debate about the media at a European level looks forward to tying the cultural sector into commercial sponsorship and adjacent industries such as tourism. <sup>83</sup>

Morley and Robins represent an alternative perspective on culture, a minority one at least within the political and policymaking elites, but whose perspective has more of a presence within cultural production. This perspective, broadly although not exclusively informed by post-structuralist and post-modernist currents, represents, essentially, an attempt to reinvent a new social and cultural liberalism. The difficulty with this position is almost exactly the mirror image of the official Euro-culture position. Here, difference is made a constitutive principle of identity and meaning. This tends to set up a binary opposition between unity/integrity (= 'bad' identity) and difference and plurality (= 'good' identity). The problem here is where does this leave those forms of 'unity' which solidarity and collective identities require? And which material and cultural differences do we *not* want to celebrate? It is noticeable for example how the political right has started to deploy the language of minority culture and cultural difference in mobilising rural life against the homogenising tyranny of urban city dwellers. What is more, liberals, who had barely uttered a word about the death of the mining communities in Britain, rallied to defend fox hunting and saw in its proposed abolition "the death of all particularity." <sup>84</sup> The point is not to find a balance between the claims of unified identity and the claims of difference, but to refuse the abstract and formalistic terms in which the debate is framed. The only way to do that however, is to ground questions of identity and meaning in those socioeconomic dynamics which Marxism knows as the mode of production.

Within European film, the commercial and cultural emphases have helped

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<sup>83</sup> A fresh boost...., op.cit., pp.10-11.

<sup>84</sup> H. Young, The Guardian July 10th, 1997, p.23.

shape two somewhat polarising attitudes or strategies: one strongly differentiates itself from Hollywood cinema, defining itself to some extent by what Hollywood is not. Everett lists self consciousness, irony, slower tempo, reflective tone, challenging editing and open endedness, as some of the qualities of the European film.<sup>85</sup> This sounds like the European art film. John Hill has suggested that the European art film is defined largely by its formal features rather than exhibiting any engagement with a shared Europeaness.<sup>86</sup> However while this is historically true, this could, and possibly is altering given changing funding arrangements and wider political and economic integration. The Disappearance of Finbar may be taken as one example of this, while the doyen of European art cinema, Kieslowski, made the Three Colours Trilogy (also part-funded by Eurimages) which speaks to an emerging sense of Europeaness.

The other strategy is to compete with Hollywood on its own terms: push up budgets, build and utilise stars and emulate the narrative structure of Hollywood films. Each strategy has its different advocates: those who argue for a commercial cinema want to compete with Hollywood on its own terms while those who argue for a European or national cinema, want film to offer a cultural alternative to the Hollywood model. Differential cultural capital, industrial backgrounds and future prospects of the participants helps to polarise these options when really it should not be a choice between a 'popular cinema' or a cinema for a middle class elite. Both strategies, the commercial and the cultural, have strengths, but also weaknesses and assumptions which need to be understood so that both strategies can be harnessed as distinct but also intersecting models which minimise their current flaws.

Those who argue for a commercial cinema competing with Hollywood on its own terms, need to address the economic and cultural problems which that involves. At the economic level, the British film industry has suffered too many implosions because of big budget films failing in the American market, for this strategy to be uncritically adopted. Even if the structural problems which inhibit commercial success were addressed, (and that is a very big 'if')

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<sup>85</sup> W. Everett, "Framing the fingerprints: a brief survey of European film" in European Identity In Cinema op.cit., p.14.

<sup>86</sup> J. Hill, "The Future Of European Cinema: The economic and culture of pan-European strategies" in Border Crossing. Film In Ireland, Britain And Europe (ed) J. Hill, M. McLoone and P. Hainsworth, Institute of Irish Studies/BFI, London, 1994, p.55.

there are still enormous cultural problems with an uncritical pursuit of a commercial and 'popular' cinema. The problem with the word 'popular' and its association with 'the people' is that we forget to ask, 'which people' are being represented here at the core of this or that project, political or cultural? This is particularly relevant to British cinema, which as we have seen, finds it difficult to mobilise the popular without situating at the heart of its vision of the people, the white, male, middle class and/or the attitudes associated with them. Thus 'the people' turn out to have a very particular class, gender and ethnic identity.

It is not that those arguing for an independent cinema with cultural and political ambitions necessarily escape these problems, but there are currents within these cinematic traditions that are addressing such questions rather more successfully. Asian and Black British cinema for example, while not unproblematic, offers much from which the industry as a whole could learn. At the same time, there are institutional problems within the 'independent' sector, particularly around audiences and cultural capital which introduce questions of class in a different way and which tend to stigmatise reaching wider audiences. For example, Artificial Eye who were distributing Land And Freedom (K. Loach, 1995) refused to allow the film to move into the multiplexes even though they had (for once) asked for the film. Thus the film had only a 15 print UK release but 85 in France.<sup>87</sup> This suggests that the distributors had a vested interest in preventing the film from making a arthouse/multiplex crossover. They wanted, one suspects, to keep their product clearly differentiated in order to retain their exclusive middle class market for both Land And Freedom and future art house products. The recent emergence of British stars like Ewan McGregor and Robert Carlyle and to a lesser extent Ian Hart, also suggests that certain commercial strategies would be viable and useful in reaching wider audiences. The whole question of stars does of course raise cultural and political questions that will impact on any text using a known star, but this impact is not unnegotiable. The way Hollywood uses its stars to dominate the story for example, should not define for everyone else the only way stars can be used.

While the low budget film has the advantage of spreading economic risk across numerous films and opening up the possibility of taking more

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<sup>87</sup> P. Keighron, ThePact Magazine, issue 50, March 1996, pp.11-12.

cultural risks, it should not equate telling 'smaller stories' with losing sight of what Jonathan Freedland calls "big picture" filmmaking, that is weaving into stories the grand themes of modernism. As he puts it:

"The likes of Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels or Divorcing Jack may be skillfully-made, but their focus is narrow. They are attempting only to tell small stories well. Much of our contemporary fiction is in the same vein, zeroing in on the miniature, the detail of human relationships, while shying away from the big picture." <sup>88</sup>

He contrasts this with recent Hollywood films like Pleasantville, The Truman Show, and Antz. This celebration of 'big themes', of freedom, progress, struggle and change, is similar to Alan O' Shea's celebration of Hollywood films for their attunement to some of the progressive currents within modernism. <sup>89</sup> There is also the danger that the small story, while it has the chance to focus in on what Hill describes as the specificities of culture, <sup>90</sup> must also guard against a tendency, slightly evident in Bhaji On The Beach, Wild West and The Disappearance Of Finbar (Irish cowboys this time instead of Pakistani cowboys and dancing the tango in Lapland) to emphasise cultural eccentricity which risks becoming, in a globalised variation of Ealing cinema at its least interesting, a kind of cosmopolitan whimsy.

The difficulty in reconciling these polarities is evident not only in industrial strategies and cinematic texts but cultural theory as well. Ien Ang for example argues that Europe's 'grand narratives' are over - collapsing the Enlightenment, May 68, Empire, Thatcherism and the Third Reich together in a glorious demonstration of both the influence and the historical vacuity of post-structuralist thought.<sup>91</sup> She calls for "the abandonment of the search for the universalising 'big story' which should open up the space for the telling of smaller, more particular stories." <sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> J. Freedland, The Guardian November 18th, 1998, p.22.

<sup>89</sup> A. O' Shea, "What A Day For A Daydream, Modernity, cinema and the popular imagination in the late twentieth century" in Modern Times, Reflections On A Century Of English Modernity (ed) M. Nava and A. O'Shea, Routledge, London, 1996.

<sup>90</sup> J. Hill, "Introduction" Border Crossing, op.cit., p.4.

<sup>91</sup> I. Ang, "Hegemony-In-Trouble, Nostalgia and the Ideology of the Impossible in European Cinema" in Screening Europe, Image and Identity in Contemporary European Cinema, (ed) D. Petrie, BFI, London, 1992, p.27.

<sup>92</sup> I. Ang, *ibid*, p.28.



The problem remains how this rejection of more 'general' themes allows one to address or even in fact to acknowledge that the world today is, as Ang notes, "a thoroughly interdependent but unequal world system."<sup>93</sup> This statement presupposes some sense of 'universal' or standard against which inequality is measured. For differentials in income, life chances, infant mortality rates, nutritional diets, etc, to be seen as *unequal*, the comparison between X and Y must assume some historically determined standard that would be more acceptable, and presumably some 'big story' that would move in the direction of correcting such inequalities. Otherwise differentials cannot be interpreted as 'inequalities' they simply become examples of the rich field of particularities which the advocates of difference celebrate. It is not grand narratives and big stories per se that need to be rejected, but particular types of big stories which need to be interrogated.

The Name Of The Rose for example exemplifies many of the weaknesses which the (relatively) big budget, 'big picture', commercial and 'popular' cinema suffers from. "[H]istory" notes Vincent Porter, "is a resource which can be plundered at will for subjects and themes which can be mapped onto the consciousness of the spectator of today."<sup>94</sup> There are however, particular political and cultural pressures at work around The Name Of The Rose which help produce a rather problematic plundering of history. The conservative cultural unity conjured up in the language of official Euro-culture is often found in mythical pasts. "[T]he fundamental European belief that we are our past," as Everett puts it,<sup>95</sup> has been accentuated by the European project. As Collins notes, one has to go back to the middle ages for:

"the last moment in European history when the horizontal stratifications were more important than vertical ones. When religious, political, military and cultural elites circulated freely across the continent sharing language, religion, ethnicity, in short the attributes of a nation. After the Middle Ages the European nation-states formed themselves on a vertical basis, through exacerbating differences with neighbours (war) and accentuating

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<sup>93</sup> I. Ang, *ibid*, p.22.

<sup>94</sup> V. Porter, *op.cit.*, p.13.

<sup>95</sup> W. Everett, "Timetravel and European film" European Identity In Cinema *op.cit.*, p.103.

similarities within the national community by expulsion and suppression of minorities.”<sup>96</sup>

Collins is describing a complex historical and ideological operation here that would have been familiar to Walter Benjamin. Such returns to the past by-pass the ‘moment’ of national formation and rediscover a wish-image from the past more complimentary to dreams of European integration now. At the same time, this return to the past is governed by the same ideological assumptions which the formation of nation-states has made common-sensical and habitual. For example, Ien Ang has argued that it is precisely Europe’s “historically sedimented ‘identity’ and its habits of thought and action”<sup>97</sup> which needs to change, particularly its racist and patriarchal underpinnings. Instead however, European culture is “characterised by smug complacency on the one hand and by unrecognised nostalgia on the other.”<sup>98</sup>

The Name Of The Rose is certainly open to this critique. It’s vision of European civilisation stemming from ancient Greece as the source of all progress and democracy is a familiar Eurocentrism. The ethnic bias of this vision is hardly questioned by the presence of Venantius, the one black monk who has no dialogue and dies half way through. The Name Of The Rose is problematic at the level of gender as well. The focus on monastic orders which equate woman with the devil is not in fact the main problem. The film’s narrational perspective, particularly as it is mediated through the key protagonist, William, does not align itself with *this* view, yet elsewhere it is in gender terms, a profoundly compromised text. The only female character is a peasant women whose name we do not learn, who appears to have no language, and who can only whimper as she seduces the young monk Adso (Christian Slater). At the film’s conclusion, the voice-over of Adso, now as an *old man* remembering his brief dalliance with the peasant wench, only adds to one’s unease. This representation chimes in with Ang’s rebuke that, “the legitimisation of male authority is one of the most persistent dominant values by which European greatness has been celebrated and commemorated.”<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup> R. Collins, “National Culture: A Contradiction In Terms?” in Television: Policy and Culture Unwin Hyman, London, 1990, p.209.

<sup>97</sup> I. Ang, op.cit., p.22.

<sup>98</sup> I. Ang, ibid, p.21.

<sup>99</sup> I. Ang, p.24.

It is perhaps precisely this dominant mythologising manner in which the past has been conceived which may in part account for why the past is rejected altogether by Bhaji On The Beach and Wild West. The Disappearance Of Finbar shares a considerable ambivalence about the past and is in part about escaping it. To that extent it exhibits a diasporic structure of feeling similar to the British Asian films discussed in the previous chapter.

The question which these debates raise is whether there has to be cultural unity to fit political and economic integration? This debate replays the issues discussed in the previous chapter. I argued that social being (class) should not be conflated with cultural identity. I also argued that consciousness of class does not require cultural homogeneity. Instead *social being*, deriving from a set of structural arrangements, *cultural identity*, deriving from the activation of a set of semantic resources, and *consciousness*, deriving from the activation of a set of political resources, need to be thought of as distinct but interacting forces. The same approach applied to the above question will conclude that structural arrangements such as political and economic union do not depend upon and do not automatically generate an isomorphic culture.

As Richard Collins has argued, the attempt to make European culture congruent with political and economic realities, simply seeks to take the nationalist model (which assumes that polity and culture must be congruent) and scale it up to a Europe wide level.<sup>100</sup> This imagines culture as a) being hermetically sealed off from influence and comparability with others; b) as unified and 'national' in its culture as the political and legal structures. Yet Collins uses his critique of such cultural models to champion the 'free' market as the best guarantor of an international cosmopolitanism. Thus anything which interferes in the market is taken as a sign of nationalism.

"Europe's proactive production and quota initiatives exemplify the nationalist aspiration to make culture and polity congruent within a Greater Europe."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> R. Collins, "National Culture: A Contradiction In Terms?" op.cit., pp.206-7.

<sup>101</sup> R. Collins, *ibid*, p.208.

A similar idea is espoused by Stuart Jeffries in his attack on French protectionism:

“isn't a culture without frontiers based on transnational capitalism, better than lots of nations fighting for their misplaced cultural virility?”<sup>102</sup>

There is a grain of truth to the argument that capitalism and cosmopolitanism go hand in hand. The market is certainly no respecter of the parochial insularity which certain versions of national belonging display. Marx noted this 150 years ago. However, it takes a rather large step to move from this observation to then valorise the market as the guarantor of diversity. For the market does produce a 'horizontal' homogenisation across nations every bit as parochial as the 'vertical' homogenisation which nationalism produces *within* nations. As my economic analysis has shown, the free market is structurally predisposed to squeezing diversity and access out of the system. The evidence is, I believe, compelling, but as with all such arguments, whether one agrees or not depends on more than a mountain of empirical data (although that can certainly be marshalled). Ultimately one also requires a modicum of imagination, the ability to believe that cinema could be so much more diverse and exciting than it currently is.

It is clear though that without a cultural policy committed to diversity, to a critical engagement with popular culture as well as more marginal and experimental forms, to the interplay between exogenous and endogenous cultural attributes and characteristics, all attempts to protect and foster cinemas within Europe will be prone to lapsing into cultural nationalism and open to attack from free marketeers for adopting a 'siege mentality'. My argument then is as follows: yes, polity and culture need not be and with globalisation intensifying, is increasingly unlikely to be, congruent with one another. So, for example, I located The Private Life Of Henry VIII at the intersection of British, American and European cultural/cinematic influences. Furthermore, in chapter two I argued that three Hollywood films could be read as particularly relevant to conditions and circumstances within Britain. But this does not undermine the argument that other films produced closer to home could also be just as relevant, possibly more

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<sup>102</sup> S. Jeffries, The Guardian July 24, 1998, p.15.

relevant and certainly different in their relevance. The argument for structures which would foster such films should not be conflated with nationalism. John Hill has made this point very effectively:

“...it is quite possible to conceive of a national cinema which is *nationally specific* without being either nationalist or attached to homogenising myths of national identity.”<sup>103</sup>

I would like to elaborate on this a little, drawing on the geo-cultural arguments that I have developed, to completely uncouple arguments for policy initiatives that seek to foster a film culture *in* Britain from arguments which are founded on fostering a British national identity. For it is not a question of exploring British or European identities since there are many identities and ways of being (class, gender, ethnicity) which intersect with but are not reducible to national cultural configurations. Rather, it is a question of exploring the uneven and conflictual social spaces within the *territory* of the nation (or within Europe). And this territory is always already permeated by exogenous forces. It is also a question of exploring different and overlapping conceptions of time, memory, history, continuity, traditions and ruptures at play across this territory. (For example, I have explored the differences and similarities which white and Asian inflected cinematic cultures have towards tradition and history). It is a question of exploring the actual and potential solidarities across different groupings, particularly how these different identities intersect with the axis of class struggle as I defined it in the previous chapter (and, bearing in mind chapter two, from which British films have much to learn from Hollywood).

It is precisely the question of solidarity, bonding and collectivity that I want to come to. I have been exploring these themes via Walter Benjamin's concept of the collective unconscious and Jessica Benjamin's interest in social relationships built around mutuality and nurture. Here we come to the vexed issue of reconciling cultural specificity to grand narratives, the particular to the general, the local to the global, diversity with unity.

The notion of 'critical regionalism' has been a useful one in terms of the local/global nexus. Martin McLoone deploys the term in order to argue that

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<sup>103</sup> J. Hill, 'The Issue Of National Cinema and British Film Production' in New Questions Of British Cinema, (ed) D. Petrie, BFI, 1992, p.16.

“the particular problems in Ireland are regional and national inflections of problems that exist elsewhere.”<sup>104</sup> Similarly Morley and Robins define critical regionalism as a “local regional culture that sees itself not introspectively but as an inflexion of global culture...that favours diversity, plurality, discontinuity.”<sup>105</sup> The problem with critical regionalism as a term is that it is being framed within a language that is exclusively cultural which, as I discussed in the previous chapter, provides only the flimsiest basis on which to provide solidarities that can challenge the asymmetries of power which the extraction and control of surplus value by a minority, presently produces.

This question returns us to the liberal idealism which underpins so much theorising about identity. Derived from post-structuralist readings of Saussurean linguistics, it is based on a formalistic binary opposition between identities which parade themselves as unified and which are on that basis considered fictions or myths, and identities based on difference which are considered more real and/or more desirable.

So Andrew Higson, discussing national identity suggests that:

“The process of identification is thus invariably a hegemonising, mythologising process, involving both the production and assignation of a particular set of meanings, and the attempt to contain, or prevent the potential proliferation of other meanings.”

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Now, while this may be true in a very general abstract sense and while it has some value in countering the consensual, centripetal tendencies of national identity, it is too abstract and formalistic a model to help us make *political* choices and decisions. The problem is that this model pushes the theorist, often, as with Higson, against their own inclinations, towards suggesting that the potential proliferation of meanings = ‘good’ because that is the reality of cultural identity, and any attempt at unity/unifying around a set of commonalities, = ‘bad’ because it disavows the ‘reality’ of perpetual

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<sup>104</sup> M. McLoone, “National Cinema And Cultural Identity: Ireland And Europe” in Border Crossing op.cit., p.170.

<sup>105</sup> D. Morley and K. Robins, Spaces Of Identity, op.cit., p.2.

<sup>106</sup> A. Higson, “The Concept Of National Cinema” in Screen, vol.30, no.4, 1989, p.37.

difference.

Immediately though some logical problems arise. On this model, one has to ask why, for example, gender, ethnic and class differences are more 'real' than the 'fictions' of national identity? For while these categories fissure national identity, do they not seek to establish some *internal* unity required to define for example, a class identity and gender identity; do they not in other words impose a certain homogeneity on the seething heterogeneity that is life? Once we accept this abstract and formalistic way of posing problems, we soon enter a zero-sum game of windy rhetorical radicalism and ultra-post-structuralism where the next person trumps your advocacy of difference by declaring that they have spied in your categories another attempt at fixing meaning and identity, giving it a spurious unity. As Terry Eagleton notes, after satirically turning Foucault's own post-structuralist methods against him, "[i]t is always possible, in other words, to stumble across a more fervent nominalist than oneself."<sup>107</sup> If, from a post-structuralist perspective, every 'big story', every grand narrative, every attempt to identify where commonality and historical progress might lie, is simply a masked particularism,<sup>108</sup> then it must also be true that every particularism is simply a masked universalism. And so the game goes on. Every foundation must be dissolved, every 'unity' broken down into smaller and smaller parts. As such esoteric debates flash and bang like fireworks across the sky, on the ground, capital reproduces itself, the noise of the fireworks almost drowning out the cries of alarm and misery.

Such a model of identity, so cut off from questions of material interest and social being, cannot sustain any substantive form of solidarity, collectivity and bonding. Morley and Robins commit themselves to this model of identity arguing for the importance of living with difference and letting difference live within the self. Now, plurality and commitment to diversity is not to be snorted at, and certainly Marxism (even those traditions which have never identified with the Stalinist 'closure') has something to learn from liberalism on this score. But a liberalism based on the cultural politics of difference makes solidarity recede to vague notions of sympathy, empathy

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<sup>107</sup> T. Eagleton, The Ideology Of The Aesthetic Blackwell, Oxford, p.380.

<sup>108</sup> A. Callinicos, Theories and Narratives, reflections on the philosophy of history, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1995, p.179.

and agonised calls to recognise the suffering of our fellow human beings.<sup>109</sup> In other words an uncritical commitment to particularity flips over into an uncritical universalism ('uncritical' because the appeal to our humanity disguises how some human beings systematically exploit other human beings). What is needed is a theory of identity which is grounded materially and historically.

Hill argues that what European cinemas share is a set of common problems and needs rather than a common culture.<sup>110</sup> The language is significant: *problems* and *needs* immediately starts to orientate us in a more materialist direction. These problems and needs are both specific to the institutions of cinema but also more general social problems and needs. In chapter two I argued that there can be a correspondence between Hollywood texts and British contexts of reception. British audiences can be constituted 'horizontally' across national boundaries, "binding them into cultural unities that are transnational" as Collins puts it, and not simply or exclusively national or 'vertical'.<sup>111</sup> If we don't assume that these unities are entirely cultural, but also unities of *material* interest, of social being, then we are truer to Collins' own formulation of the non-necessity of isomorphic relations between culture and territory than Collins is.

Furthermore, we are now on the cusp of reformulating the global/local nexus in new directions which require policy initiatives to protect against unequal trade flows and horizontal homogenisation associated with Hollywood domination, but which are not founded on nationalism. If European policy developed so as to guarantee more equitable access to audiences, cultural producers could work towards developing not a common European culture, but 'horizontal' correspondences between different points within Europe. Such *constellations* in social space would be both rooted in the specifics of a particular time and place, but (and here we return to a version of telling 'big stories') would have correspondences in other places within Europe and in all likelihood, beyond.

Take for example La Haine with its tale of conflict, solidarity and

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<sup>109</sup> D. Morley and K. Robins, Spaces of Identity, op.cit., pp.39-40.

<sup>110</sup> J. Hill, "The Future Of European Cinema: The economic and culture of pan-European strategies" in Border Crossing op.cit., p.67.

<sup>111</sup> R. Collins, "National Culture: A Contradiction In Terms?" op.cit., p.214.



deprivation in a French housing estate. Is this only a peculiarly French story? Clearly not. A Guardian report on French President Jacques Chirac's visit to Glasgow's Easterhouse estate was montaged on the same page with images from La Haine and a report on the Parisian estate La Noe, the central location in the film, and culturally as far apart from Easterhouse as one is likely to get within Europe.<sup>112</sup> The report notes that a year after the film, there has been little change on the French estate. This is only a surprise to those who think that film has a direct cause and effect impact on the world. Does this lack of change in La Noe mean that the film has in some way 'failed'? I do not think so. It is not possible generally to measure the impact of film in such a crude way. Rather it can produce the ideas and images and values which help percolate through into a wider collective consciousness and provide at some point in the future, fuel for utopian desire, without which (and this much is certain), there will be no progressive change.

### **Allegorical Images**

I want to conclude this chapter with two images: one from each film, reading them as allegories of some of the general themes and methods of this study. The first image is from The Name Of The Rose. Towards the end of the film, the narrative splits along two parallel lines. In the library, Brother William is surrounded by flames. The books are burning and he is desperately trying to save himself and some of these printed testaments to human knowledge. The cathedral to this knowledge, the library, had ironically, been in the charge of Jorge who detested everything it stood for, who restricted access to this knowledge and who even committed murder to prevent the books undermining the Church's authority. In the other narrative strand, outside, another manifestation of that authority, the Spanish Inquisition, is preparing to burn the scapegoats it has found to explain the murders which have been committed in its name by Jorge. In a Europe which has seen the burning of books and the political tyranny and scapegoating which was Fascism, the image of Brother William in the library, strikes a chord and would have been familiar to Benjamin, who died on the Spanish border fleeing the Nazis, a death that may or may not have robbed the world of a first draft of the complete Arcades project that he may

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<sup>112</sup> The Guardian, May 13th, 1996, p.3.

or may not have been trying to preserve.<sup>113</sup>

In the other narrative strand, outside the library, the Spanish Inquisition, led by Bernardo Gui, prepare to burn the former Dolcenites and the peasant girl Adso has fallen in love with. The other peasants look on, angry but cowed. And then everyone outside turns to see the flames leaping from the towers of the library. Far from this being a disaster, as it is for Brother William, the peasants take this as a sign that the old order is vulnerable and that the moment of revolt and of an albeit momentary rupture with the past, has presented itself. The leading Dolcenite, Remigio de Varagine dies at the stake, but not before he senses what is about to happen. Remigio and Brother William represent two rather different positions which the intelligentsia can take in relation to the exploited class. I suggested earlier that the film's attempt to use Brother William's discourse to call the radical discourse of the Dolcenites into question, was not entirely successful. For it is not Brother William who saves the peasant girl from the stake, but the peasants themselves. It is not Brother William who dispenses justice, but the peasants who topple Bernardo Gui to his death. Brother William, like Henry VIII in the Korda film, is something of a mock-heroic character who does not control the causal chain of events and to whom we are invited at the narrative's conclusion (rather than just the beginning, as is typical of Hollywood) to adopt a critical stance. Whatever its inadequacies, we can extract from The Name Of The Rose something of the 'big story' of class conflict and emancipation and of the problematic position of the 'intelligentsia' in that story which has been a recurrent theme in this project's narrative.

At the end of The Disappearance Of Finbar the camera tracks across the vast expansive snow covered terrain. Danny's voice-over brings the film to a close. We find out that Finbar has left the little community in Lapland that Danny found him in. This time however, Danny does not follow him. Nor does he return 'home' to Ireland, but stays in Lapland. Finbar has become another myth, this time to the Laplanders. Danny likes to think that Finbar returned to Ireland, to his mother and to home. But it seems unlikely. In a sense this is a film about the impossibility of forgetting and the impossibility of returning home, at least the 'home' that was known,

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<sup>113</sup> S. Buck-Morss, Dialectics of Seeing, Walter Benjamin And The Arcades Project MIT Press. Cambridge, Massacusetts, 1989, pp.331-336.

since to leave is to change home both for the self and for those who have been left behind. In this sense the film articulates the two conceptions of time which I have been working with through-out. A conception of time based on continuity, memory, the pull of the past, and a conception of time absolutely central to capitalist modernity, based on the rupture, the break with what has been. The snowy landscape which the camera reveals is both a community and a tabula rasa, the wiping of the slate clean, the starting again, the reinvention of self and society which underpins the transformatory dynamic of modernity. Travel as a metaphor for displacement, change and cultural exchange also raises the question of forging ties and severing ties, of belonging and separation. I have been mapping the tensions between these conceptions of time and space in cinematic representations and cultural theories of those representations. In the diasporic films of the previous chapters I argued that these films had given up attempting to articulate the present in relation to the past (seeing all such attempts to do so as beguiling myths) while many of the films discussed in the other chapters are characterised by trying precisely to bring past and present into a premature and therefore ideological unity and alignment. The Name of The Rose attempts something similar, using Brother William to affirm Enlightenment liberalism. Confronted with this strategy, Benjamin advises us to: "blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history - blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework."<sup>114</sup> Or, we may add, blasting a particular image or textual fragment out of the continuum of history assigned to it by the narration. In this instance, we must blast the Dolcenites and the peasants out of the continuum of history that linked Brother William as a man ahead of his time with the Enlightened now, constellating them instead with the unfinished business of the now. This, I suggest, is a better response to such ideological 'big stories' than that proposed by what I have called, post-Enlightenment liberalism.

At the level of our temporal relations, The Disappearance Of Finbar poses the difficulty of reconnecting continuity and rupture, the past and the present. Within the film, Finbar's mythologisation by two communities is an attempt to ease that difficulty. Such myths may carry our utopian hopes for a future that is different from the now, but such hopes are often complexly entangled with precisely the values and attitudes that may

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<sup>114</sup> W. Benjamin, "Theses On The Philosophy Of History" op.cit., p.245.

prevent such a future ever being achieved. At the level of social space, The Disappearance Of Finbar hints at the difficulties of trying to reconcile mobility with solidarity. The film may be seen as part art film (the protagonists' aimless quest), <sup>115</sup> a mode of film practice itself ambivalently torn between representing a nationally stratified Europe, and a 'universalist' liberal humanism, <sup>116</sup> and part political allegory concerning a new European space of exiles and migrants, of the local and the global. The scene set in Stockholm which was excised from the final cut may have weighed the film more towards the latter and some of the harsh realities of global migration which Sivanandan writes about. <sup>117</sup> Such textual ambivalences and half muted voices are as much a question of contexts (the immediate circumstances of production, the wider institutional arrangements of the industry, and the larger political picture) as they are an issue of cinematic language.

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<sup>115</sup> D. Bordwell "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice" in Film Criticism vol.4, no.1, 1979.pp.58-59.

<sup>116</sup> S. Neale "Art Cinema As Institution" in Screen pp.34-35.

<sup>117</sup> A. Sivanandan, "New circuits of Imperialism" in Race and Class, 30 (4), 1989.

## **Conclusion**

"Do not write the conclusion of a work in your familiar study. You would not find the necessary courage there." - Walter Benjamin. <sup>1</sup>

This study has been influenced by Benjamin in many ways, but the manner of writing the conclusion is not one of them. I say this less because I am indeed writing it in my familiar study, than because of the approach I am taking. The style of this work has I think (and hope) been very un-Benjaminian insofar as for all the theoretical excursions the reader has had to travail, I have striven for a clarity and rigour not usually found in Benjamin's brilliant but difficult, associational, aphoristic prose. The best way of approaching the conclusion to a work with the ambitions and scope this one has, is to offer a more or less chapter by chapter summary, identifying the key themes, concepts and issues and drawing them together through each chapter. Nevertheless, I keep faith with Benjamin's approach enough to acknowledge that while this conclusion is a summing up, it also develops latent polemical issues and a few new analytical notions, so that as a conclusion, it is still rather porous.

The ambition of this study can be stated in a sentence: it has offered an analysis of British national identity by locating it within a temporal dynamic (the tradition/modernity couplet) and a geo-cultural dynamic (the triangulation between America, Europe and the Imperial legacy). The main theoretical framework has been provided by Walter Benjamin, not least because his concepts were sensitive to the complexities of time and space within capitalist modernity. Benjamin's methodology of the constellation is a prime example. A constellation for Benjamin is an act of critical labour in which ideas, images, times and/or spaces are juxtaposed in such a way as to reveal some historical truths. Truth for Benjamin works in a way similar to a photomontage, <sup>2</sup> which may be taken as a miniature constellation or dialectical image. Truth is *transitory*, the product of a particular arrangement of materials, but - and here Benjamin differs from the post-structuralists - truth is *not arbitrary*. There are real truths, historically relative though they may be, that need to be revealed. The concept of the constellation provides the armature for this study. It is structured in part around a historical and theoretical constellation between the 1930s and the

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<sup>1</sup> W. Benjamin, *One Way Street*, (ed) S. Sontag, New Left Books, London, 1979, p.65.

<sup>2</sup> S. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics Of Seeing, Walter Benjamin And The Arcades Project* MIT Press. Massachusetts, 1989, pp.58-64.

post-1979 period.

I used post-1979 theoretical methods and interests which have re-evaluated the popular, gender, desire, consumption, hybridity and nostalgia to explore the 1933 film, The Private Life Of Henry VIII. We discovered nostalgia in the retreat to an English core identity, hybridity in the porosity of the text vis-a-vis American and European influences and we saw how contradictory popular culture and consumerism is vis-a-vis class and gendered identities. But in extending the methods and interests of post-1979 theory back to the 1930s, one of the key postulates of much contemporary theory - that there has been an epochal break with the past, with the "old" ways of studying the popular, with the "grand narratives" - is thereby undermined: hybridity, nostalgia, popular culture as contradictory: it has always been thus. The postmodernist break with modernism merely replays *one* modernist and Modernist tendency to try and break with tradition. The concept of the constellation is fundamentally an attack on such linearity in thinking.

Conversely, Benjamin anticipates themes and theories that have been important to cultural theory in the 1980s/90s. His interest in place(s), in the urban experience, in architecture and travel constellates significantly with our own period of accelerated globalisation. The modernity/tradition couplet benefits from Benjamin's interest in the transition from *laissez-faire* capitalism to monopoly capitalism, a transition which constellates significantly with our own historical moment, when *laissez-faire* returns, now coupled with multi-national capitalism and reliant even more than in the C19th, on the state.

Benjamin also anticipates contemporary cultural theory's interest in the progressive possibilities of popular culture. In his "The Work Of Art In The Age Of Mechanical Reproduction", Benjamin notes that in the anti-mass cultural critiques of film, the term "distraction" means diversion from the harsh realities of the world. He quotes Duhamel as an example, although he might also have had his friend Adorno in mind. In response, Benjamin audaciously transforms the meaning of "distraction" by shifting the scene to the reception of architecture. He argues that the distracted or habitual use of buildings (both by touch and sight) suggests an unconscious appropriation of social space. The reception of film Benjamin then argues, is

similarly characterised by distraction (a habitual recognition of its social use) which in contrast to the contemplation which high art seeks, allows film to be absorbed into the social life of the spectator. <sup>3</sup> From meaning diversion, Benjamin's own discursive diversion has transformed the meaning of "distraction" into something more positive: immersion in life. My discussion of spectatorship has similarly attempted to immerse the reception of film in its social and historical context. If "The Work Of Art..." essay finds Benjamin at his most optimistic and positive, his work overall did use some version of the negative meaning of "distraction". For Benjamin, the world of popular culture was also a "dreamworld, and a conception of collective "awakening" from it ...[was] synonymous with revolutionary class consciousness." <sup>4</sup> It is the dialectic between utopianism and ideology within popular culture which Benjamin was interested in and which has been central to my methodology.

In terms of reading individual film texts, the deployment of a Benjaminian reading of the archaic works like this. The critic must search out what it is that is *outdated in the present* which the projection back into the past seeks to break from. Having identified the text's utopian "wish-image", caution is then required. This juxtaposition of the past with the needs of the present sounds like a constellation, but as Susan Buck-Morss notes, "a dream image is not yet a dialectical image, and desire is not yet knowledge." <sup>5</sup> If a constellation is based on transiency - on historically relative truths - then many wish-images are characterised by myth, which Barthes argued, abolishes or transcends history. <sup>6</sup> This is the other pole of utopianism - the ideological representation of the past which seeks its help, its vitality or affinities (class and gender domination for example) to eternalise the social order in the present.

Thus The Private Life Of Henry VIII mobilises and reproduces a mythic figure from English history; an ur-figure for a hierarchical but unified, distinctive and (vis-a-vis Europe) independent national identity. Simultaneously, this ideological impulse is coupled with a utopian one, located around desire, which has both class and gender implications, and which articulates the

<sup>3</sup> W. Benjamin, "The Work Of Art In The Age Of Mechanical Reproduction" in Illuminations Pimlico Press, London, 1999, pp.232-233.

<sup>4</sup> S. Buck-Morss, The Dialectics Of Seeing, op.cit., p.253.

<sup>5</sup> S. Buck Morss, The Dialectics Of Seeing, ibid, p.114.

<sup>6</sup> R. Barthes, Mythologies Paladin, London, 1986, p.143.



utopian wish-image for a break with what is outdated in the present (the bourgeois order in the Depression hit 1930s). Although the utopian impulse is contained within the ideological, we must also ask what in this projection back into the past, remains troubling, disruptive and uncontrollable. In The Private Life Of Henry VIII I suggested this surplus could be detected along a class axis (power as a Brechtian spectacle) and a gender axis (female desire and gender equality).

It is worth comparing the results of this hermeneutic procedure with The Name Of The Rose. In this film, that which is outdated in the present is none other than the vertical solidarities of national identity itself as the film articulates the wish image for a common European culture. This utopian impulse to break with the present is coupled with another which seeks to affirm certain ideological continuities and affinities. The film articulates a mythologising polemic on behalf of a patriarchal-liberal version of the Enlightenment which is implicitly eternalised in the quasi-Holmsian figure of Brother William. But again there is a surplus, this time located around the Dolcenites, who articulate, along the axis of class, more radical interpretations of proto-Enlightenment thinking which suggest that there is an unfinished project in our own time.

Like Benjamin, British cinema has been preoccupied with the archaic traces of the past, traces which function as the repository of both utopian and ideological meanings/significations in relation to the present. The key archaic image which I have discussed as an important resource within British self imaginings, is the important ideologeme of the organic community. While the meaning of the ideologeme is historically changeable, if we 'freeze' it at any particular point in time and dissect it, we find the ideologeme to be structurally unstable and contradictory. As we have seen, this is because it is one half of the tradition/modernity couplet and each term of the couplet has its positive and negative versions. On the one hand the organic community is the ur-image of a reconciliation with nature, with the self, with the wider community; it stands as a negation of capitalist modernity which has, Ruskin argued, "broken [men] into small fragments and crumbs of life."<sup>7</sup> On the other hand it is the ur-image of everything modernity promises to release us from: a stifling environment, a limitation

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<sup>7</sup> J. Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic" in Industrialisation and Culture 1830-1914 (eds) C. Harvie, G. Martin, A. Scharf, Macmillan/Open University Press, London/Basingstoke, 1970, p. 189.

of horizons, a shutting out of the new or the unfamiliar, in Marxist terms, the revolutionising of the forces and relations of production and consumption. Similarly, modernity has its positive and negative versions: on the one hand it signifies an expansion of horizons (Yanks), the transformation of existing social relations (Local Hero), new opportunities and possibilities (here the geo-cultural reference point is often America); on the other hand, since within capitalist modernity these changes constitute merely the “empty time” (Benjamin) of change without emancipation, then modernity too must be escaped from (Local Hero, Shirley Valentine) or updated via a return to the past (A Room With A View) and here the geo-cultural reference point is often “underdeveloped” Europe, the Mediterranean or some remote quarter of England or more likely, Scotland (more rugged and authentic in the popular cultural imaginary, less effete and with less visible signs of social stratification) or a combination of Scotland and the Mediterranean (Another Time, Another Place).

In chapter one, I traced the organic community's genealogy from feudalism to its remooring in a different socioeconomic mode of production, with new class relations. Via Ruskin, Arnold, Leavis and Thompson, the organic community was mobilised by dissident middle class figures, trying to construct an alternative national identity to one in which economics dominates everything. The 1930s represents a key moment in the dissemination of the organic community and not coincidentally it is also the moment of crisis and decline of *laissez-faire*. One of the things which has changed in the representation of the organic community in the 1980s, a change which signifies wider historical realities (globalisation) is that the ideologeme is no longer easily mobilised to construct a homogeneous national identity, but is increasingly responding to a renewed sense of cultural diversity and its place within a set of global transactions (eg Local Hero and, more genuinely, The Disappearance Of Finbar) even as its nostalgic reflexes are analysed and critiqued ( Bhaji On The Beach and Wild West).

The temporal dynamics between tradition and modernity cannot be understood on its own. To do so would be to offer a purely endogenous account of Britishness and as such would accept rather too much at face value one of the dominant myths of national identity: that of internal self

determination. Globalisation however has forced the ideologeme of the organic community to acknowledge its exogenous relations and this is true of critical methodologies as well. Here I have endeavoured to locate Britishness as crucially dependent on the differences, comparisons, similarities and negotiations between itself and three significant geo-cultural others: America, Europe and the Imperial legacy. Britishness is forged within this triangulation. Dominant (insular) notions of Britishness have tended historically to define themselves *against* these significant Others but the reality is that Britishness is penetrated by these other spaces, in all sorts of ways - perhaps most succinctly summed up in Appadurai's conception of various 'scapes'. What is politically interesting is how these influences are taken up and mobilised by different and conflicting groups within the notionally unified but actually fractured national identity.

For example, the importance of American culture and Hollywood cinema for British identity, fractured as it is along class and gender lines, is acknowledged and explored in chapter two. This importance has a long history,<sup>8</sup> but the political proximity between American and British politics in the post-war period, culminating in the Reagan-Thatcher free market axis during the 1980s, only intensified already established links and transactions. In this chapter I start to engage with a critique of postmodernism initially sketched vis-a-vis Frederic Jameson's take on the Postmodern nostalgia film in the introduction. The characteristics ascribed to Postmodernism seemed to have been drawn up by splitting them off from Modernism which is then presented as one-sided, uncontradictory phenomena.

Jameson's critique of Postmodernism in relation to the nostalgia film reinvents Lukacs' critique of Modernism in relation to history with the crucial attitudinal difference that Jameson declares that there is no place we can position ourselves other than *inside* the postmodern. Jameson's sense of closure here is only underscored by his Third Worldist politics which tries to find alternatives to or progressive versions of Postmodernism in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere. Lukacs by contrast positioned himself wholly outside the cultural paradigm of Modernism, refusing (in contrast to Benjamin) to allow any of its themes, strategies or

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<sup>8</sup> P. Swann, The Hollywood Feature Film In Postwar Britain St.Martin's Press, New York. 1987.

epistemological implications any entry into his own categories. This was, we may say, Lukacs' weakness, just as Jameson's positioning within the Postmodern, is his. Lukacs sees Modernism as reducing history and "cultural heritage" to a kind of rubble or "jumble sale", a "heap of lifeless objects in which one can rummage around at will, picking out whatever one happens to need in accordance with the exigencies of the moment." <sup>9</sup>

Similarly, Jameson sees history in the nostalgia film as being reduced to the jumble sale of an eclectic mix of styles, images, period-logoes and icons drawn from the well of a media saturated society. Once again, the similarity between Postmodernism and Modernism in cultural theory and aesthetic practice, calls into question the epochal break from Modernism assigned to Postmodernism. Indeed we must read Postmodernism as one more aspect of the novelty and fashion-driven dynamics of the commodity society.

In chapter two I return to the question of the postmodern in relation to the science fiction genre - which may be said to constitute "home turf" for postmodernism, since the genre has, in the 1980s, become closely associated with many of its major themes. The ur-theme of postmodernism may be said to be travel. The nomadic identity is evident in its vision of a 'dispersed' subject, while the notion of boundaries and borders collapsing (e.g. between the human and the synthetic, between genders, between private and public, technology and nature) is central to its claims for epochal (or perhaps apocalyptic) transformations.

The gist of my counter-argument is at one level simply a call for some moderation in those claims. There has been a renegotiation of some of the borders and boundaries established between the 1930s and the late 1970s, but a *renegotiation* rather than the wholesale vision of borders and boundaries becoming a virtual impossibility in the age of the postmodern. Now, one of the key blurring of boundaries which I take to be significant in these films in terms of spectatorship, is the blurring of class boundaries. Where this is referenced in postmodern theory it is usually a new variant of the *embourgeoisement* theory, where class consciousness and perhaps class itself is viewed as being eroded not by "mass culture" but by a more plural, fragmented cultural scene. I acknowledge the blurring of class lines in

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<sup>9</sup> G. Lukacs, "Realism in the Balance" in *Aesthetics And Politics* (ed) R. Taylor, Verso, London, 1988, p.54.

Hollywood's science fiction films, but reverse the political implications, arguing that this is not a sign of embourgeoisement, but, (revisiting the Brecht/Benjamin arguments of the 1930s) the proletarianisation of the middle class.

These realities however are difficult to signify within British culture. The question of the blurring of class identity is a central one in American culture: its ur-image is the expanding frontier of the west, but it underpins American beliefs in social and not just geographical mobility. In my discussion of The Private Life Of Henry VIII I argued that the best evidence of the influence of American culture/Hollywood cinema in that film, was the composite nature of Henry's class identity. While the organic community has fostered a longstanding delusionary aspect to British notions of class, that the aristocracy and the plebeians share something in common against the bourgeoisie, the blurring of class lines *within a single figure* (Henry himself) is rather un-British, at least cinematically speaking, although there are precedents in the culture generally (the Diana Spencer phenomenon being the latest example).

When studying the Hollywood films and their British context of reception in the 1980s, we find a similar textual strategy: a composite nature to the class identities of the main protagonists with whom the spectator is invited to identify. Once more there is, at least in part, a utopian, anti-bourgeois alliance being offered. Here however as we might expect, the aristocracy are not part of the alliance, rather (and this would be difficult for a British film to articulate) the blurring is between figures who represent various strata of the middle classes and the proletariat, a blurring which is linked to the intensification of the class struggle in the era of neo-liberalism. The question of how these middle class characters respond to the conflict between capital and labour is paralleled in the realm of theory.

I mapped out or constellated three theoretical responses to this intensification of neo-liberalism: a) a culturally conservative response (Lasch, Gray), anxious about the corrosive effect of an unleashed capitalism on bourgeois culture and concerned to reconnect capitalism to the bourgeois institutions (the family, the state) it once seemed able to accommodate; b) a culturally radical but politically quietest response

associated with the Marxism Today/ "New Times" project which celebrated the new positions of opposition, the new identities opening up as social relations underwent profound transformations. This British Left postmodernism functions in this constellation of positions, as the curious inversion of: c) the American postmodernist response mapped out by Jameson. Where Marxism Today see the fragmentation of block identities, Jameson sees, in a new version of the Frankfurt School's thesis of incorporation, the integration of the once autonomous monad into the sprawling corporate systems of advanced capitalism; where Marxism Today is wildly over optimistic about new socio-cultural trends, Jameson is, in the main, fairly pessimistic.

We can rotate through each of these positions to produce a dialectical critique, extracting the truth content and aporias of each one as a means of mapping the meaning(s) of the selected texts for the "distracted" spectators. For example, the culturally conservative position reminds us that the erosion of long established social relations, of the state as a bulwark against rapacious capitalism, of male working environments and of the traditional family, cannot be uncritically celebrated - particularly when capital is driving the process, as opposed to say, feminism - because people have attachments to these "traditional" social relations that are not irredeemably reactionary, but which may have their own anti-capitalist possibilities. It was this truth content which the culturally conservative critique articulated and which the Marxism Today/ "New Times" position repressed, even as the cultural conservatives failed to see that particular social and institutional relations are historically relative rather than timeless and universal norms. Jameson's position meanwhile focused on the corporate, systemic totality of capital - repressed by the Marxism Today emphasis on consumerism, plurality, fragmentation, desire and subjectivity - but the overly pessimistic conclusion that culture was now secreted by the economic failed to see the possibility of new sites of resistance celebrated by Marxism Today. My argument was that each of these positions failed to locate the fundamental clash between capital and labour, between use-value and exchange value, at the centre of their world views. These very old conflicts and contradictions cannot be wished away by theory.

The transformation of class relations initiated in the era of neo-liberal

acceleration, interlocks with gender relations, as we saw. The psychical dimension to these dynamics was explored via the Frankfurt School and Valerie Walkerdine's empirical-theoretical audience study. The Frankfurt School represents a Left cultural conservatism to parallel the Right wing defenders of bourgeois culture. They defended the Oedipus complex, the patriarchal family and the private sphere for providing a relatively autonomous zone for psychical development. Many of their anxieties concerning the penetration of the logic of capital into the family, into the body and into the individual psyche, are however, precisely those which popular film, seen by the Frankfurt School as one more agency for the legitimisation of social domination, are negotiating in a highly contradictory way. Like the Frankfurt School, these films often hope to preserve the integrity of the individual and the family even as the transformations at the leading edge of advanced capitalism puts enormous pressure on such traditional categories and institutions. The recent film, The Matrix (1999) takes the anxieties concerning the eclipse of the individual, evident in Total Recall and RoboCop, to new heights. We also glimpse in these science fiction films, new non-patriarchal family relations (Aliens) or the displacement of the family altogether by the team or "buddies" ( RoboCop, Total Recall). Walkerdine's work provides some empirical evidence for just how complicated the (working) class and gender politics of (male) spectatorship is. It is caught in a complex oscillation between being inside and outside the family and being inside and outside the social order. I also introduced the work of Jessica Benjamin to suggest that these films were in some ways a quite desperate attempt to reconstruct the possibility of mutuality within a social order that has evacuated the capacity to nurture from large areas of political, economic and social life.

The Frankfurt School's defence of the Oedipal complex meant that it was unable to respond to the potentially progressive possibilities as traditional relations between the sexes were exposed to the trauma of change and recomposition. I explored this possibility in relation to Aliens and picked up the thread of this argument again in the chapter on gendered travels. Here, I explored how changing gender relations were represented from within a British cultural matrix. I linked Walter Benjamin's ideas concerning the use of the archaic as a way of dramatising utopian aspirations, with Jessica Benjamin's theories of the 'archaic' traces of the pre-Oedipal stage

in the individual's psychical history.

As we have seen in chapter one, Sue Harper has argued that in historical melodramas, the past is frequently presented as relatively open for its female protagonists, not ordered and closed. Jessica Benjamin's theories help explain why the past might be a site for renegotiating gender difference, which is the first difference the human subject learns. For Jessica Benjamin, the pre-Oedipal stage is a period of fluctuation in identity, before the rigid and unequal gender divisions between self and Other are forged. It is the traces of these fluctuations, this gender aperture, which are reactivated by narrative travels to more primitive terrains (Room With A View or Shirley Valentine and/or by the appearance of strangers (Bauman's "undecidables") from outside the national space at extraordinary moments in history (e.g. the Second World War) when some sort of transformation in gender relations seems already to be underway.

Such archaic traces and their consequences for identity are also tapped into from a male perspective in films like Local Hero and Funny Bones. The latter in particular is self consciously aware of the way the 'primitive' body disrupts the modern social order. The intertextual references to King Kong on the Empire State Building (here replayed with Lee Evans on Blackpool Tower, and later Jerry Lee Lewis aping the great ape on a model of the Tower) are not accidental. Funny Bones is precisely about mining the body's subversive pre-Oedipal disruptions of ossified social conventions and boundaries, resisting the commodification of those energies into neatly packaged jokes. Once more, Anglo-American travel is a movement in time, a genealogical retracing of roots which reconnects subjects hollowed out by some distant theft (which is of course the ur-image of the commodity form); a theft which has in turn left the father either too powerful or too weak to forge a proper relationship with the son(s). This gender polarity, as Jessica Benjamin calls it, reminds us that like the free market, the Oedipal model never really finds a point of equilibrium. Instead it polarises precisely because its psychical dynamics are meshed with a social order based on domination.

In Local Hero I identified this split between the primitive and the modern in the play of gazes at work in the film. Via Weber's discussion of the way



rationalisation erodes traditional values, the Frankfurt School's analysis of the links between instrumental rationality and irrationality, and Walter Benjamin's discussion of the meshing of rationalisation and myth, I discussed the antinomy of the naturalist and enchanted gaze. I suggested that the film oscillates between an affirmation of science, rationalisation and modernity (the "realist" pole of British film) and an affirmation of tradition, myth and nature (the "fantasy" pole of British cinema). This is a tension which is found in other positions which are critical of capitalist modernity. Here is Marx on the impact of capitalism on the labour-nature nexus:

"Nature becomes for the first time simply an object for mankind, purely a matter of utility; it ceases to be recognised as a power in its own right; and the theoretical knowledge of its independent laws appears only as a stratagem designed to subdue it to human requirements, whether as the object of consumption or as the means of production. Pursuing this tendency, capital has pushed beyond national boundaries and prejudices, beyond the deification of nature and the inherited, self sufficient satisfaction of existing needs confined within well-defined bounds, and the reproduction of the traditional way of life." <sup>10</sup>

Initially Marx appears to be critical of capitalism's instrumental domination of nature by science and technology - one is reminded of Marx's critique of the instrumental domination of labour. But then, after "[p]ursuing this tendency" Marx's tone shifts as he reminds us of the positive dimensions of this process, as it explodes the static, parochial conditions of pre-capitalist and tradition bound society. Marx is both describing a contradictory process, but one also senses in this tonal shift an ambivalence within Marx's discourse. Of course, for Marx, there was no question of hankering nostalgically for a "smaller world" (Zukin) <sup>11</sup> as Local Hero does. As Marx notes, in what might be a review of the film:

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<sup>10</sup> K. Marx, Marx's Grundrisse (ed) D. McLellan, Paladin Books, 1973, pp.111-112.

<sup>11</sup> S. Zukin, Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, p.81.

“At early stages of development the single individual appears to be more complete, since he has not yet elaborated the abundance of his relationships, and has not established them as powers and autonomous social relationships that are opposed to himself. It is as ridiculous to wish to return to that primitive abundance as it is to believe in the continuing necessity of its complete depletion. The bourgeois view has never got beyond opposition to this romantic outlook and thus will be accompanied by it, as a legitimate antithesis, right up to its blessed end.”<sup>12</sup>

Compare this dense, dialectical passage with Leavis and Thompson in Culture and Environment. The latter posit modernity as an absolute rupture with and depletion of all that is good in the past while also finding a literary conduit which re-establishes a line of continuity with that primitive abundance. They oscillate between the twin conceptions of time (continuity and the tabula rasa) characteristic of bourgeois philosophy.

When crossed with the Imperial legacy, this fissure in bourgeois culture between modernity and tradition, locates the Black and Asian Other in the slot occupied by Marina, Ferness and the Scots in Local Hero. As Fanon noted, on the one hand, the coloniser tells the colonised to “[l]ay aside your history” and accept “a society such as ours, industrialized to the highest degree, dominated by scientism.” As Local Hero knows only too well, in such a society, “what matters now is no longer playing the game of the world but subjugating it.” But then, as Fanon notes, the coloniser oscillates to the other (romantic) pole and admits that on occasions, “we will turn to you as we do to our children - to the innocent, the ingenious, the spontaneous. We will turn to you as to the childhood of the world...Let us run away for a little while from our ritualized, polite civilization...In a way, you reconcile us with ourselves.”<sup>13</sup> Once again, what criticism has to hold onto is the two dynamics of utopianism and ideology which are simultaneously at work in a text or discourse. The symbolic reconciliation which Fanon writes of, implies discontent with the present, as John Mackenzie argued, but it does so from a position which is very complicit with a history of domination. In particular, the Other tends to suffer from a suspension from historical change when viewed through the colonial optic.

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<sup>12</sup> K. Marx, Marx's Grundrisse *ibid*, p.82.

<sup>13</sup> F. Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks Pluto Press, London, 1986, p.132.

The chapter on diasporic travels brings the Imperial legacy for British identity and its geo-cultural politics to the fore. At the same time it picks up and develops a number of ideas already engaged with in previous chapters. The question of the postmodern and nomadic identities versus the imperatives of solidarity and collectivism now crossed with 'race' and ethnicity; the question of cultural tradition, exchange and change, now crossed with displacement and migration; the themes of proto-racism and national identity evident in Local Hero, A Letter To Brezhnev, Another Time, Another Place and Shirley Valentine, now dealt with more substantially in relation to British Asian identity.

The concept of the diaspora has been drawn into the politics of both cultural fundamentalism (the need to return to origins) and postmodernism (there is no "home" to return to). This clearly parallels the split between the "cultural fundamentalism" of British culture (the invention of traditions, the proposed seamless continuity across time, the organic community) and the acknowledged ruptures of modernity. Once again, the postmodern turns out to be a position within the long epoch of modernity rather than a qualitatively new order (Buck-Morss).<sup>14</sup> Here the tradition/modernity or cultural fundamentalism/postmodernism split is filtered through the historical experiences of colonialism where the west expands to meet the rest and then, via post colonial migration, the rest tracks the west back into its own metropolitan heartlands.

To begin to make sense of this historical experience in a politically productive way means challenging both the assumption of continuity with which Ambrose Washington gazes at the exotic other in Bhaji On The Beach, and the assumption of rupture which postmodernism makes. One example of the latter is found in Wild West. This film reprises, at least as far as its key Asian protagonists are concerned, a utopian America in contrast to the films discussed in chapters two and three. The highly Postmodern presumption on which this utopianism is based, is that the deterritorialisation of culture and meaning in effect cancels out the semantic accretions which have attached themselves to cultures in the course of history. In effect a tabula rasa is being proposed where country and western music can be severed from its ethnic, geographical, cultural

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<sup>14</sup> S. Buck-Morss, The Dialectics Of Seeing, op.cit., p.359.

and political roots. And to some extent, it can. But, as the aspirant band find out at the end of the film when they are rejected by the music company, there are always limits and pressures, and very often, it is corporate capital which is setting those limits and exerting those pressures.

The somewhat schizoid tendency within postmodern theory is to both acknowledge the global systemic quality of capital (Jameson) but also insist on a world so pluralised, so shifting, so fragmented, that the possibility of mapping accumulating and unequal relations of power become in Appadurai's otherwise suggestive, but somewhat "borderless" model, profoundly difficult. Hall meanwhile, in his model of "new ethnicities", collapses broader social interests - let us say, class interests - back into cultural identities. This renewed sensitivity to cultural difference, change and exchange has been won though at the huge cost of conforming to the global market economy and abandoning the great themes of freedom, emancipation and progress which have characterised resistance to the logic of capital. In this schizoid theory it is almost as if capital can be figured as having a collective project or interests while other categories or identities such as labour, citizens or consumers, are shattered into numerous fragments or "life styles". This latter term is even being applied now to public health issues.

It is of course possible to think of some very difficult areas of conflict between the themes of emancipation and say, cultural tradition. The question of arranged marriages within the Asian community would be one example. But it is also possible to think of a great many more areas where the majority interests are antithetical to those of capital. The military-industrial complex, the biotech industries, the nuclear industries, the car and tobacco industries impact on large numbers of people across the world and exemplify that Thanatos, the death drive, is well served by capitalism. Or, to switch from class to gender, if on one level men have historically benefited from the divisions of labour institutionalised within capitalism, then on another level, as a cursory glance at popular culture demonstrates, emotionally and psychologically, men have been disabled by those self same divisions. Why can this case not be put forward as part of the case for female emancipation? Such emancipation requires, in turn, that the collective interests of women be recognised, whatever their differences. The

differences are generational in Bhaji On The Beach, but the gaze remains collective and in this respect compares favourably with the privatising romantic or touristic gaze of the white female travellers or would-be travellers in the films discussed in chapter four. Yet, as I noted, Bhaji On The Beach's collective identity, is logically at odds with the centrifugal Postmodern impulse in the film. This accounts for its naturalistic, day-in-the-life structure: the collective identity of the women can only be affirmed for less than twenty four hours.

Before moving onto summarising the final chapter I want to draw together some of the thematic strands around the concept of "realism" in this thesis. I have avoided sustained discussion of the traditional theoretical references which this concept usually requires (Lukacs, Brecht, Williams, MacCabe).<sup>15</sup> This is largely because I have grounded my discussion of realism in relation to the ideologeme of the organic community. I wanted to see how notions of "realism" and its antithesis, fantasy, were immanent to this cultural resource, rather than start with a theoretical grid that may be distant from the ideologeme in time and space. I argued in chapter one that within the British context, the organic community is paradoxical: it is a fantasy often articulated with "realist" epistemologies such as historiography and sociology as well as cultural analysis. Its proximity to "realism" in the 1930s was further underscored by the sense that the organic community lay at the core of national identity, which could not of course be associated with anything as trivial as fantasy. Nor as it happens could the British national identity have much truck with the avant-garde, save for the most contained Grierson sponsored explorations. It is interesting that in debates within Black film aesthetics in the 1980s, these three terms (realism, fantasy and the avant-garde) all re-appear. However, when the institutional space for the avant-garde contracted once more with the withering of the film workshops and the increasingly conservative cultural politics of Channel Four, the more familiar and dominant duality within British cinema, between realism and fantasy, reasserted itself (as we saw in relation to our two British Asian films).

During the 1980s the influential response of some cultural critics was, rightly in many ways, to reclaim fantasy from the margins it is usually

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<sup>15</sup> See for example J.Hill, Sex, Class and Realism, British Cinema 1956-1963, BFI, London, 1996, pp.53-65.

pushed to in discussions of British cinema. This interest in fantasy, in desire, in the subjective dimensions of life, cannot be separated from the political and technologically sponsored unleashing of consumerist fantasies in the 1980s. The “New Times” emphasis on the progressive possibilities of a consumer-led politics, is part of the same social continuum in which film critics began to equate fantasy with transgression. My discussion of the organic community tried to deconstruct this binary between realism and fantasy and their equation, respectively, with the reality principle and the pleasure principle.

The organic community is, I suggest, a libidinal fantasy, but then, drawing on Marcuse, we saw that this was true of the formation of all communities generally.<sup>16</sup> And of course, realisms of different kinds, have had as their central drive, the depiction of social ties, the formation of community. This is particularly important when thinking about female collectivity precisely because it is these social ties which the reality principle finds it difficult to accommodate, as, in their different ways, A Letter To Brezhnev or Bhaji On The Beach testify. Conversely, fantasy has no automatic hotline to the pleasure principle. It can be highly conservative, as indeed it is in A Letter To Brezhnev (although the film itself does not realise this) and Bhaji On The Beach (which by contrast is highly conscious of the way fantasy is meshed with “distraction” in the negative sense, as an ideological dream).

The final chapter, European travels, considers a number of the themes developed in the previous chapters within the context of European political, economic and possibly cultural integration. This in itself represents the institutionalisation of globalisation, or perhaps more accurately, the formation of large scale regional blocks in global competition. Within this context, I returned to the question of Hollywood’s domination of British and European cinema, paying particular interest to the material foundations of that domination and, using The Disappearance of Finbar as a case study, the European initiatives which have been deployed to facilitate film production, distribution and exhibition within the region. I argued that cultural policy within Europe was fissured between free market extremists and those who thought the state still has a role to play in countering market inequalities. The GATT crisis represented a conflict precisely between

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<sup>16</sup> H. Marcuse, 5 Lectures, Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Utopia, Allen Lane/Penguin Press, London, 1970, p.19.

those within Europe who aligned themselves to American trade policy, with its commitment to the commodification of every nook and cranny of social, political, cultural and economic life, and those who do not confuse corporate interests with public interests.

The cultural politics of the latter group, the protectionists, are however, problematic. What is defended very often are the most regressive, nostalgic, traditional national identities which then provide the template for pan-national conceptions of Europeaness. Such a model of identity reproduces the same problems in recognising the claims of those traditionally marginalised (explored in the chapters on gender and diasporic travels) as is evident in The Name Of The Rose. This is not to suggest that all attempts to engage with the past are inevitably reactionary; a position which is unthinkable within a Benjaminian paradigm. Within The Name Of The Rose and more successfully in other films such as Patrice Leconte's Ridicule (1996), there is a potentially revolutionary constellation of the elites (past and present) and the irrational basis of their domination. Meanwhile The Disappearance Of Finbar represents an example of a white diasporic sensibility, tapping into the ethnic margins of the Irish and the Laplanders. Once again, as with Bhaji On The Beach, the film can be read as caught within the cleft stick of community on the one hand (and the Laplanders are reprised as having that vigorous egalitarian community not a million miles away from that envisaged by Leavis and Thompson) and the centrifugal impulses of modernity.

If the cultural protectionists are conservative, there is a radical cultural position, which, like that adopted by Marxism Today vis-a-vis the political hegemony of Thatcherism, is profoundly unsatisfactory. By making difference its constitutive principle, this position, a kind of post-Enlightenment liberal plea for tolerance and plurality, is unable to identify a set of interests which draw "differences" into some sort of convergence, some sort of solidarity. This is a pity given the opportunities opened up by our historical conjuncture. The vertical solidarities of national identity, as Benedict Anderson noted, have provided an effective counter to the potential of an anti-bourgeois class identity. The political, economic and cultural processes that have been set in train by European integration may indeed prove to be a very dangerous transitional period for the bourgeoisie. As the

vertical solidarities of the nation-state are called into question and undergo transformation, the pan-national class character of political and economic policy becomes ever more obvious while the pan-European institutions that implement those policies lack any deep rooted cultural legitimacy. Within this context, film may play a modest role in helping to constellate the problems and needs of people in one part of Europe with those of another. This will require infrastructural support to counter Hollywood domination, cultural arguments to counter the uncritical boosterism of European policy makers and, ultimately a wider political context in which, as in the 1930s, the delegitimation of capital comes onto the agenda once more.



## **Abstract**

### **Travels In Modernity:** **Spectatorship and Narratives** **In British Film Culture**

By Michael Wayne

A Ph.D submitted to Middlesex University, 1999

This study develops a paradigm for the analysis of British cinema and film culture which is attuned to the temporal and spatial dynamics of modernity and globalisation. The question of British national identity is analysed within a spatial triangulation that consists of America, Europe and the Post-Imperial legacy, and a temporal dynamic designated by the tradition/modernity couplet. Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history provides a key theoretical reference point. The study is structured in two parts. Part one provides much of the historical contextualisation, taking two case studies to examine the question of spectatorship. In the first case study I examine The Private Life Of Henry VIII (1933) and in the second, the context of reception for three Hollywood science fiction films in the 1980s. Benjamin's notion of the constellation provides the theoretical rationale for this temporal juxtaposition. Part one constellates two historical moments (the end of *laissez-faire* economics and its return) and two theoretical positions on modernity (Benjamin and postmodernism). Part two focuses on British produced films in the 1980s and 1990s which involve travel into and out of the national space. Movements in space are also movements in time. The role of the organic community as a component of tradition within the modernity/tradition couplet, is examined. As well as offering a Benjaminian model for textual analysis, the study argues that much contemporary cultural theory influenced by postmodernism fails to adequately grasp the temporal and spatial dynamics of modernity across the demarcations of class, gender and ethnicity.

## Select Filmography

I list here the production details of all the main films discussed in the thesis as well as a selection of other films referred to which have a significant or illuminating intertextual relation with the key films. I have divided the films into USA, UK and European sections. The information is taken from Film Index International, from which I have also copied the brief plot synopsis for each film.

### Abbreviations

p: producer  
sc: script  
ph: photography  
ed: editor  
m: music

### UK Films

#### **Another Time, Another Place** (1983)

Director: Michael Radford.

Production Company: Umbrella Films, Rediffusion Films, Channel Four, Scottish Arts Council.

Running Time: 102 minutes.

Synopsis: Biographical film about Jessica Kesson.

Phyllis Logan (Janie), Giovanni Mauriello (Luigi), Denise Coffey (Meg), Tom Watson (Finlay), Gianluca Favilla (Umberto), Gregor Fisher (Beel), Paul Young (Dougal) Yvonne Gilan (Jess). Carol Ann Crawford (Else).

P: Timothy Burrill, sc: Michael Radford, based on an original novel by Jessica Kesson.

ph: Roger Deakins, ed: Tom Priestley, m: John McLeod.

#### **Bhaji On The Beach** (1993)

Director: Gurinder Chadha.

Production Company: Umbi Films.

Running Time: 101.

Synopsis: About an Asian women's group outing to Blackpool for the day.

Kim Vithana (Ginder), Sarita Khajuria (Hashida), Lalita Ahmed, (Asha), Shaheen Khan (Simi), Jimmi Harkishin (Ranjit), Mo Sesay (Oliver).

p: Nadine Marsh-Edwards, sc: Meera Syal, ph: John Kenway, ed: Oral Ottley, m: John Altman and Craig Preuss.

**Catherine The Great (1934)**

Director: Paul Czinner

Production Company: London Films.

Running Time: 95.

Synopsis: Romantic drama set in the court of Catherine the Great.

Elisabeth Bergner (Catherine II), Douglas Fairbanks Jr. (Grand Duke Peter), Flora Robson (Empress Elizabeth), Gerald Du Maurier (Lococq).

p: Alexander Korda, sc: Arthur Wimperis and Lajos Biro, ph: Georges Perinal, ed: Harold Young, m: Ernst Toch.

**Chariots Of Fire (1981)**

Director: Hugh Hudson.

Production Company: Enigma productions, Twentieth Century Fox, Allied Stars.

Running Time: 123.

Synopsis: The story of two British athletes, Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell, who ran in the 1924 Olympic Games.

Ben Cross (Harold Abrahams), Ian Charleson (Eric Liddell), Nigel Havers (Lord Andrew Lindsay) Ian Holm (Sam Mussabini).

p: David Putnam and Dodi Fayed, sc: Colin Wellan, ph: David Watkin, ed: Terry Rawlings, m: Vangelis.

**Elephant Boy (1937)**

Director: Robert Flaherty and Zoltan Korda.

Production Company: London Films.

Running Time: 84.

Synopsis: Indian boy sees the dance of the Elephants.

Sabu (Toomai), W.E. Holloway (Father), Walter Hudd (Petersen), Allan Jeayes (Machua Appa), Wilfred Hyde White (Commissioner).

p: Alexander Korda, sc: John Collier, ph: Osmond Borradaile, ed: Charles Crichton, M: John Greenwood.

**Four Feathers, The (1939)**

Director: Zoltan Korda.

Production Company: London Films.

Running Time: 126.

Synopsis: Harry Faversham finds himself branded a coward by his friends and family when he resigns his commission before the war campaign against the Sudan uprising.

John Clements (Harry Faversham), Ralph Richardson (Captain John Durrance), June Duprez (Ethne Burroughs), Jack Allen (Lieutenant Willoughby), John Laurie (Khalifa).

p: Alexander Korda, sc: R.C. Sherriff, Lajos Biro, Arthur Wimperis from the original novel by A.E.W Mason, p: Georges Perinal, ed: William Hornbeck and Henry Cornelius, m: MiklAs Rozsa.

**Funny Bones (1995)**

Director: Peter Chelsom.

Production Company: Hollywood Pictures Company.

Running Time: 126.

Synopsis: Comedy about the son of comedy icon George Fawkes, Tommy, who tries to make a career as a comedian himself. Forever under the shadow of his father Tommy decides to go to England in search of new material. In Blackpool, Tommy meets the Parker family, who are comedians themselves, and finds that his father stole their ideas and repertoire.

Oliver Platt (Tommy Fawkes), Jerry Lewis (George Fawkes), Lee Evans (Jack Parker), George Carl (Thomas Parker) Freddie Davis (Bruno Parker).

p: Nicholas Frye, sc: Peter Chelsom and Peter Flannery, ph: Eduardo Serra, ed: Martin Walsh.

**Local Hero (1983)**

Director: Bill Forsyth.

Production Company: Enigma Films and Goldcrest Films.

Running Time: 111.

Synopsis: A large Houton-based oil firm sends Mac MacIntyre over to Scotland to complete a deal to buy up an entire village to construct a new oil refinery. Far from being against the proposal the Scots are eager to sell for a profit. Problems occur with the deal and the eccentric boss, Felix Happer arrives to sort things out.

Burt Lancaster (Felix Happer), Peter Reigert (MacIntyre) Denis Lawson (Gordon Urquhart) Peter Capaldi (Danny Oldsen), Fulton MacKay (Ben Knox), Christopher Rozycki (Victor Pinochkin) Jenny Seagrove (Marina) Jennifer Black (Stella Urquhart).

p: David Puttnam, sc: Bill Forsyth, ph: Chris Menges, ed: Michael Bradsell, m: Mark Knopfler.

**Last Of England, The (1987)**

Director: Derek Jarman.

Production Company: British Screen, Channel Four, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen.

Running Time: 87.

Synopsis: A narrator introduces scenes of the devastation of England, intercut with shots of director Derek Jarman working in his London flat.

Spring, Gerrard McArthur, John Phillips, Gay Gaynor, Mathew Hawkins, Tilda Swinton, Nigel Terry (voice).

p: James Mackay, ph: Derek Jarman, ed: Peter Cartwright, m: Simon Fisher Turner.

**Letter To Brezhnev, A (1985)**

Director: Chris Bernard.

Production Company: Yeardream, Film Four International, Palace Productions.

Length: 95.

Synopsis: Story of two Liverpool girls who go off with two Russian sailors during one day and night of shore leave, with one of the pair falling in love, the girl missing him so much that she writes to the leader of the Soviet Union, wanting to go and live with her lover.

Alfred Molina (Sergei), Peter Firth (Peter) Margi Clarke (Teresa King), Tracy Lea (Tracy), Alenandra Pigg (Elaine Spencer).

p: Janet Goddard, sc: Frank Clarke, ph: Bruce McGowan, ed: Lesley Walker, m: Alan Gill.

**Monk Dawson (1996)**

Director: Tom Waller.

Production Company: De Warrenne Pictures.

Running Time: 104.

Synopsis: When journalist Bobby Winterman goes to visit his childhood friend Eddie Dawson at a monastery, the story is told in flashback of their early life and particularly Eddie's experiences as a rebellious Roman Catholic priest.

John Michie (Eddie Dawson), Benedict Taylor (Bobby Winterman), Paul Hamilton (Jenny Stanten), Martin Kemp (David Allenby), Michael Cashman (prior of Pixhaven).

p: Tom Waller, sc: James Magrane, based on the novel by Piers Paul Read, ph: Teoh Gay Hian, ed: Tom Waller, m: Mark Jensen.

**My Beautiful Laundrette (1985)**

Director: Stephen Frears.

Production Company: Working Title, SAF Productions, Channel Four.

Running Time: 97.

Synopsis: Story of two friends, Johnny, a working class white boy and Omar a middle class Pakistani. Omar's uncle, Nasser, gives him a run-down laundrette to manage and the friends, who become lovers, decide to make it the best laundrette in London with videos and other amenities. To finance their scheme Omar steals money from Salim's drug smuggling operation.

Saeed Jaffrey (Nasser), Roshan Seth (Papa), Daniel Day-Lewis (Johnny) Gordon Warnecke (Omar), Shirley Anne Field (Rachel), Derrick Branche (Salim), Rita Wolf (Tania).

p: Sarah Radclyffe, sc: Hanif Kureshi, ph: Oliver Stapleton, ed: Mick Audsley, m: Ludus Tonalis.

**My Son The Fanatic (1997)**

Director: Udayan Prasad.

Production Company: Son of Zephyr Limited, Zephyr Films, BBC Films, UGC Droits Audiovisuels, Arts Council of England.

Running Time: 87.

Synopsis: Parvez is a Pakistani cab driver living in Bradford. While his home life becomes fraught when his son decides he is an Islamist fundamentalist, Parvez finds himself drawn more and more towards Bettina, a white prostitute who regularly uses his cab.

Om Puri (Parvez), Rachel Griffiths (Bettina), Stellan Skarsgrd (Schitz), Akbar Kurtha (Farid).

p: Chris Curling, sc: Hanif Kureshi, ph: Alan Almond, ed: David Gable, m: Stephen Warbeck.

**Passion Of Remembrance, The (1986)**

Director: Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien.

Production Company: Sankofa Film and Video Collective.

Running Time: 82.

Synopsis: History from the 1950s to the 1980s, telling the personal histories of the Baptiste household, a Black British family.

Anni Domingo (Female Speaker), Joseph Charles (Male Speaker), Antonia Thomas (Maggie Baptiste), Carlton Chance (Gary), Jim Findley (Tony Baptiste), Ram John Holder (Benji Baptiste).

p: Martina Attille, sc: Maureen Blackwood and Isaac Julien, ph: Sten Bernstein and Nina Kellgren, ed: Nadine Marsh-Edwards, m: Tony Remy.

**Private Life Of Don Juan, The (1934)**

Director: Alexander Korda.

Production Company: London Films.

Running Time: 89.

Synopsis: Comedy set in Spain in 1650 charting the decline and fall of Don Juan.

Douglas Fairbanks (Don Juan), Merle Oberon (Antonia), Benita Hume (Dolores), Binnie Barnes (Rosita), Claud Allister (Duke).

p: Alexander Korda, sc: Lajos Biro and Frederick Lonsdale, ph: Georges Perinal, ed: Harold Young, m: Ernst Toch.

**Private Life Of Henry VIII, The ((1933)**

Director: Alexander Korda.

Production Company: London Films.

Running Time: 96.

Synopsis: A historical epic which explores the reasons why Henry VIII had six wives.

Charles Laughton (Henry VIII), Robert Donat (Culpepper), Binnie Barnes (Katheryn Howard), Elsa Lanchester (Anne of Cleves), Merle Oberon (Anne Boleyn), Wendy Barrie (Jane Seymour), Lady Tree (Nurse).

p: Alexander Korda, sc: Arthur Wimperis and Lajos Biro, ph: Georges Perinal, ed: Harold Young, m: Kurt Schroeder.

**Raining Stones (1993)**

Director: Ken Loach.

Production Company: Parallax Pictures, Film Four International.

Running Time: 90.

Synopsis: Set on a council estate in Middleton, on the outskirts of Manchester, where unemployment has created an alienated underclass and bred petty crime, vandalism, drug abuse and poverty. Follows the attempts of an unemployed man to find the money to buy a communion dress for his daughter.

Bruce Jones (Bob Williams) Julie Brown (Anne Williams), Tom Hickey (Father Barry), Ricky Tomlinson (Tommy), Mike Fallon (Jimmy).

p: Sally Hibbin, sc: Jim Allen, p: Barry Ackroyd, ed: Jonathan Morris, M: Stewart Copeland.

**Riff Raff (1991)**

Director: Ken Loach.

Production Company: Parallax Pictures.

Running Time: 96.

Synopsis: Steve, an unemployed Scot recently out of prison, gets a job on a building site in London, and settles into a squat found with the help of his co-workers. A relationship develops with a young drifter, Susan, but is terminated when she succumbs to drug abuse.

Robert Carlyle (Steve), Ricky Tomlinson (Larry), Jimmy Coleman (Shem), Emer McCourt (Susan).

p: Sally Hibbin, sc: Bill Jesse, ph: Barry Ackroyd, ed: Jonathan Morris, m: Stuart Copeland.

**Room With A View, A (1985)**

Director: James Ivory

Production Company: Merchant Ivory Productions

Length: 110

Synopsis: A sheltered young woman falls in love with the son of a socialist whom she meets on holiday in Florence.

Maggie Smith (Charlotte Bartlett, Helena Bonham Carter (Lucy Honeychurch), Julian Sands (George Emerson), Daniel Day-Lewis (Cecil Vyse), Simon Callow (Reverend Arthur Beebe), Judi Dench (Miss Eleanor Lavish).

p: Ismail Merchant, sc: Ruth Praver Jhabvala, ph: Tony Pierce-Roberts, ed: Humphrey Dixon, m: Richard Robbins.

**Sammy And Rosie Get Laid (1987)**

Director: Stephen Frears.

Production Company: Film Four, Cinecom, British Screen.

Running Time: 101.

Synopsis: Film tells the story of Sammy, the hedonist, thoroughly English son of a prominent Asian politician who abandoned the young man and his mother in London years before to seek wealth and power in his homeland, and the effect the father's return has on the family.

Shashi Kapoor (Rafi Rahman), Frances Barber (Rosie), Claire Bloom (Alice), Roland Gift (Danny), Meera Syal (Rani).

p: Tim Bevan, sc: Hanif Kureshi, ph: Oliver Stapleton, ed: Mick Audsley, m: Stanley Myers.



**Shirley Valentine** (1989)

Director:: Lewis Gilbert.

Production Company: Paramount Pictures.

Running Time: 108.

Synopsis: Romantic comedy about a bored housewife who goes away on holiday to Greece to get away from her mundane chores.

Pauline Collins (Shirley Valentine-Bradshaw), Tom Conti (Costas Caldes), Julia McKenzie (Gillian), Alison Steadman (Jane), Joana Lumley (Marjorie), Sylvia Sims (headmistress) Bernard Hill (Joe Bradshaw).

p: Lewis Gilbert, sc: Willy Russell, ph: Alan Hume, ed: Lesley Walker, m: Willy Russell and George Hatzinassios.

**Shopping** (1994)

Director: Paul Anderson.

Production Company: Impact Pictures, Channel Four, Polygram Filmed Entertainment, Kuzui Enterprises, WGM Pictures.

Running Time: 106.

Synopsis: Set in a futuristic Britain, Jo and Billy go shopping and meet lawless kids, fascistic police and get involved in several car crashes. Action-thriller.

Sadie Frost (Jo), Jude Law (Billy), Sean Bean (Venning), Sean Pertwee (Tommy), Jonathan Pryce (Conway), Marianne Faithfull (Bev).

p: Jeremy Bolt, sc: Paul Anderson, ph: Tony Imi, ed: David Stivlen, m: Barrington Pheloung.

**Welcome II the Terrordome** (1994)

Director: Ngozi Onwurah.

Production Company: Non Aligned Communication, Channel Four, Metro Tartan.

Running Time: 94.

Synopsis: Terrodome is a black city ghetto of the near future. Black Rad and Spike are drug dealers and gang leaders. Spike is going out with a white girl, Jodie, whose ex-lover, Jason, takes revenge on her. Tit-for-tat violence spirals until Black Rad, his family, Spike, Jodie, the police and Jason's white gang, are consumed in death and destruction.

Suzette Llewellyn (Angela), Saffron Burrows (Jodie), Felix Joseph (Black Rad), Valentine Nonyela (Spike), Jason Traynor (Jason), Ben Wynter (Hector).

p: Simon Onwurah, sc: Ngozi Onwurah, ph: Alwin H. Kuchler, ed: Liz Webber, m: John Murphy, David A. Hughes, Black Radical MKII.

**Whisky Galore! (1949)**

Director: Alexander Mackendrick.

Production Company Ealing Studios.

Running Time: 82.

Synopsis: Comedy of the vain attempts of a Home Guard captain to protect the cargo of whisky on a wrecked ship off a Hebridean island whose inhabitants have been deprived of whisky because of the war.

Basil Radford (Captain Paul Waggett), Catherine Lacey (Mrs Waggett) Joan Greenwood (Peggy Macroon), Wylie Watson (Joseph Macroon), Gordon Jackson (George Campbell).

p: Michale Balcon, sc: Compton Mackenzie, ph:Gerald Gibbs, ed: Joseph Stirling and Charles Crichton, m: Ernest Irving.

**Wild West (1992)**

Director: David Attwood.

Production Company: Initial Film and Television, Wild West.

Running Time: 85.

Synopsis: Set in Southall and centring around an Asian country and western band. The Honky Tonk cowboys is initially composed of three young boy musicians who later take Rifat as lead singer. Things come to crisis point when a record company want to sign up Rifat without the boys.

Naveen Andrews (Zaf Ayub), Ravi Kapoor (Ali Ayub), Lalita Ahmed (Mrs Ayub), Sarita Choudhury ( Rifat), Shaun Scott (Tony).

p: Eric Fellner, sc: Harwant Bains, ph: Nic Knowland, ed: Martin Walsh, m: Dominic Miller.

**Yanks (1979)**

Director: John Schlesinger.

Production Company: CIP Filmproduktion, United Artists.

Running Time: 141.

Synopsis: Set in the early part of World War Two, deals with the relationships between American troops based in England and the local inhabitants.

Vanessa Redgrave (Helen), Richard Gere (Matt Dyson), William Devane (John), Lisa Eichorn (Jean Moreton), Chick Vennera (Danny Ruffelo), Wendy Morgan (Mollie), Ken Thompson (Ken).

p: Joseph Janni, sc: Colin Welland, ph: Dick Bush, ed: Jim Clark, m: Richard Rodney Bennett.

## **USA**

### **Alien** (1979)

Director: Ridley Scott

Production Company: 20th Century Fox, Brandywine Productions.

Running Time: 117.

Synopsis: A group of astronauts, returning from a routine voyage in a commercial space craft, encounter an alien force which they try to combat.

Tom Skerritt (Dallas), Sigourney Weaver (Ripley), Harry Dean Stanton (Brett), John Hurt (Kane) Ian Holm (Ash), Yaphet Kotto (Parker).

p: Ronald Shusett, sc: Dan O'Bannon, ph: Derek Vanlint, ed: Peter Weatherley, m: Lionel Newman.

### **Aliens** (1986)

Director: James Cameron

Production Company: Brandywine Productions, 20th Century Fox.

Running Time: 137.

Synopsis: Ripley and her cat have been in hibernation for 57 years when they are rescued by a salvage team. The authorities dismiss her stories about the alien, but she is sent on a mission to investigate the alien's home planet, when contact is lost with a settlement of colonists there. A commando-type team go with her and they combat the aliens.

Sigourney Weaver (Ripley), Carrie Henn (Newt), Michael Biehn (Hicks), Paul Reiser (Burke), Lance Henriksen (Bishop), Bill Paxton (Hudson), William Hope (Gorman), Jenette Goldstein (Vasquez).

p: Gordon Carroll, sc: James Cameron, ph: Adrian Biddle, ed: Ray Lovejoy, m: James Horner.

### **Big** (1988)

Director: Penny Marshall.

Production Company: Twentieth Century Fox, American Entertainment Partners II, Gracie Films.

Running Time: 104.

Synopsis: Comedy, in which a 12 year old boy transforms himself into a 35 year old man. He takes a job with a large toy company, where he is a great success because of his ability to predict the toys young boys will want to play with.

Tom Hanks (Josh Baskin), Elizabeth Loggins (Susan Lawrence), John Heard (Paul Davenport), Jared Rushton (Billy).

p: James L. Brooks, sc: Gary Ross and Anne Spielberg, ph: Barry Sonnenfeld, ed: Barry Malkin, m: Howard Shore.

**Bladerunner** (1982)

Director: Ridley Scott.

Production Company: Blade Runner Partnership, Ladd Company, Run Run Shaw.

Running Time: 117.

Synopsis: Highly advanced (Nexus 6) androids designed to supply "off world" labour and outlawed on earth have infiltrated Los Angeles. They appear totally human and therefore the task of eliminating them is doubly difficult. They are so human they have emotions and can even be unaware that they are machine because memories can be implanted in them to give them a more rounded feeling. It is one man's job to "retire" all the robots.

Harrison Ford (Rick Deckard), Rutger Hauer (Roy Batty), Sean Young (Rachael), Edward James Olmos (Gaff), M. Emmet Walsh (Captain Bryant), Daryl Hannah (Pris), William Sanderson (J.F. Sebastian), Brion James (Leon), Joseph Turkel (Dr Tyrell).

p: Brian Kelly, sc: Hampton Fancher and David Webb Peoples based on an original novel by Philip K. Dick, ph: Jordan Cronenweth, ed: Marsha Nakashima, m: Vangelis.

**Brigadoon** (1954)

Director: Vincente Minnelli.

Production Company: Metro-Goldwyn Mayer.

Running Time: 102.

Synopsis: Musical. Story of two young Americans on holiday in Scotland who come upon a village that only comes to life for one day every century.

Gene Kelly (Tommy Albright), Van Johnson (Jeff Douglas), Cyd Charisse (Fiona Campbell), Elaine Stewart (Jane Ashton).

p: Arthur Freed, sc: Alan Jay Lerner, ph: Joseph Ruttenberg, ed: Albert Akst, m: Frederick Loewe.

**Dog Day Afternoon** (1975)

Director: Sidney Lumet

Production Company: Artists Entertainment Complex Productions, Warner Bros. Pictures.

Running Time: 130.

Synopsis: Story of a homosexual who attempts to rob a bank to finance a sex change operation for his lover. When the robbery goes wrong, a tense stand off between Sonny, his

partner, the hostages and the FBI, ensues.

Al Pacino (Sonny Wortzik), John Cazale (Sal), Carol Kane (Jenny),  
James Broderick (Sheldon), Charles Durning (Moretti), Lance Henriksen (Murphy).

p: Martin Bregman, sc: Frank R. Pierson, ph: Victor J. Kemper, ed: Dede Allen.

**Escape From New York (1981)**

Director: John Carpenter.

Production Company: Avco Embassy Pictures, International Film Investors, Goldcrest Films  
International, City Films.

Running Time: 99.

Synopsis: Fantasy set in New York in 1997, when Manhattan Island has been turned into a vast maximum security prison. The story involves a bid to rescue the President of the United States who is held hostage by the inmates when his plane crash lands on the island.

Kurt Russell ("Snake" Plissken), Lee Van Cleef (Bob Hauk), Ernest Borgnine (Cabbie), Donald Pleasance (President), Isaac Hayes (The Duke).

p: Larry Franco, sc: John Carpenter, ph: Dean Cundey, ed: Todd Ramsay, m: John Carpenter and Alan Howarth.

**Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, The (1962)**

Director: John Ford.

Production Company: Paramount Pictures, John Ford Productions.

Running Time: 121.

Synopsis: A gun-shy young lawyer arrives in town and wins acclaim and political office having supposedly shot Liberty Valance, a thuggish gun-for-hire.

John Wayne (Tom Doniphon), James Stewart (Ranson Stoddard), Vera Miles (Hallie Stoddard), Lee Marvin (Liberty Valance), Woody Strode (Pompey), Lee Van Cleef (Reese).

p: Willis Goldbeck, sc: James Warner Bellah, based on a story by Dorothy M. Johnson, ph: William H. Clothier, ed: Otho Lovering, m: Cyril J. Mockridge.

**Nine To Five (1980)**

Director: Colin Higgins.

Production Company: I.P.C. Films, Twentieth Century Fox.

Running Time: 109.

Synopsis: Three women office workers dream about getting even with their chauvinistic boss. Drawn into mutual friendship they begin to entertain their wildest fantasies and wind up devising an outrageous scheme, kidnapping the boss and running the office how they want.

Jane Fonda (Judy Bernly), Lily Tomlin (Violet Newstead) Dolly Parton (Doralee Rhodes), Dabney Coleman (Franklin Hart Jnr), Sterling Hayden (Russell Tinswothy).

p: Bruce Gilbert, sc: Colin Higgins and Patricia Resnick, ph: Reynaldo Villalobos, ed: Pembroke J. Herring, m: Charles Fox.

**Robo Cop (1987)**

Director: Paul Verhoeven

Production Company: Orion Pictures Corporation.

Running Time: 102.

Synopsis: In a futuristic Detroit which has been overrun by crime and corruption, a young policeman is blown up in an explosion. In an experimental operation he is turned into a cyborg - half man, half robot.

Peter Weller (Murphy), Nancy Allen (Lewis), Ronny Cox (Dick Jones), Kurtwood Smith (Boddicker).

p: Jon Davison, sc: Edward Neumeier, ph: Jost Vacano, ed: Frank J. Urioste, m: Tom Villano.

**Terminator 2 Judgment Day (1991)**

Director: James Cameron.

Production Company: Carolco Pictures, Pacific Wester Productions, Lightstorm Entertainment.

Running Time: 136

Synopsis: Two cyborgs from the future arrive. One seeks to kill the future resistance leader, another seeks to protect him against the machines running the world in 2029.

Arnold Schwarzenegger (T800), Linda Hamilton (Sarah Connor), Edward Furlong (John Connor) Robert Patrick (T1000).

p: Gale Anne Hurd, sc: James Cameron and William Wisher, ph: Adam Greenberg, m: Brad Fiedel.

**Thelma & Louise** (1991)

Director: Ridley Scott

Production Company: MGM, Pathe Communications, Percy Main.

Running Time: 130.

Synopsis: Road movie about two girls who set out for a weekend trip together. On the way, Thelma is attacked by a would-be rapist. Louise shoots him and they carry on their journey recklessly, in an attempt to reach the Mexican border before the police can trace them.

Susan Sarandon (Louise), Geena Davis (Thelma), Michael Madsen (Jimmy), Harvey Keitel (Hal), Christopher McDonald (Darryl), Brad Pitt (J.D.).

p: Ridley Scott, sc: Callie Khouri, ph: Adiran Biddle, ed: Thom Noble, m: Hans Zimmer.

**Total Recall** (1990)

Director: Paul Verhoeven

Production Company: DeLaurentis Entertainment Group, Carolco International.

Running Time: 113.

Synopsis: Quaid is a happily married construction worker in the year 2084, who is haunted by a recurring dream of a previous Martian existence. He contacts a mental implant company to have the memory of a Martian vacation trip as a secret agent injected into his subconscious. Unknown to the doctors, it appears that he has had part of his memory already tampered with to erase his true identity as a rebel intelligence agent from Mars. Is his life now the reality or the fantasy?

Anold Schwarzenegger (Quaid) Sharon Stone, Rachel Ticotin, Michael Ironside, Ronny Cox.

p: Buzz Feitshans, sc: Steven Pressfield, ph: Jost Vacano.

## Europe

### **Crime Of Monsieur Lange, The (1935)**

Director: Jean Renoir.

Production Company: Films Oberon.

Country: France.

Running Time: 84.

Synopsis: An employee of an unscrupulous publisher who has faked his own death to avoid bankruptcy is blackmailed by him. He kills the publisher and escapes with the help of his now happy fellow workers.

Rene Lefevre (Lange), Jules Berry (Batala), Odette Florelle (Valentine), Nadia Sibirskaia (Estelle), Sylvia Bataille (edith), Henri Guisol (Meunier), Maurice Baquet (Charles).

p: Andre Halley Des Fontaines, sc: Jacques Prevert, ph: Jean Bachelet, ed: Marguerite Renoir, m: Jean Wiener.

### **Disappearance of Finbar, The (1996)**

Director: Sue Clayton

Production Company: Channel Four Films, Pandora Cinema, First City Features, Samson Films, Victoria Film Production.

Country: Ireland, United Kingdom, Sweden.

Running Time: 104.

Synopsis: When Finbar Flynn disappears from his Irish home town, the community are distraught. Three years later, after receiving a phone call from Finbar, his friend Danny eventually tracks him down in the far north of Sweden.

Luke Griffen (Danny Quinn), Jonathan Rhys Myers (Finbar Flynn), Sean McGinley (Detective Roche), Fanny Risberg (Abbi), Sif Ruud (Abbi's grandmother).

p: Martin Bruce-Clayton, sc: Sue Clayton, Dermot Bolger, based on a novel by Carl Lombard, ph: Eduardo Serra, ed: J. Patrick Duffer, m: Davy Spillane.



**Haine, La (1995)**

Director: Mathieu Kassovitz.

Production Company: Productions Lazennec, Sept Cinéma, Studio Canal Plus.

Country: France.

Running Time: 95.

Synopsis: Covers twenty four crucial hours in the lives of three ethnically diverse young men, representatives of a generation relegated to the public housing projects on the outskirts of Paris. There is a riot on the housing estate after a police beating leaves a young Arab nearly dead.

Vincent Cassel (Vinz), Hubert Kound (Hubert), Sad Taghmaoui (Sad), Marc Duret (Inspector "Notre Dame").

p: Alain Rocca, sc: Mathieu Kassovitz, ph: Pierre Aim, ed: Mathieu Kassovitz and Scott Stevenson.

**Journey Of Hope (1990)**

Director: Xavier Koller.

Production Company: Condor-Features, Schweizerische Radio und Fernsehgesellschaft, RTSI, Film Four.

Running Time: 110.

Country: Switzerland.

Synopsis: Based on a true story. A young boy dies when he and his family try to cross illegally from Turkey to Switzerland.

Necmettin Cobanoglu, Nur Surer, Emin Sivas, Yaman Okay, Yasar Guner.

p: Alfi Sinniger, sc: Xavier Koller and Feride Sisekoglu, ph: Elem Ragalyi, ed: Miklos Hajdu, m: Manfred Eicher.

**Land And Freedom** (1995)

Director: Ken Loach.

Production Company: Messidor Films, Road Movies Filmproduktion, British Screen, European Co-Production Fund, Televisin Espanola, Canal Plus, BBC Films, Degeto Film, ARD, Filmstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen, BIM Distribuzione, Diaphana, Working Title Films.

Running Time: 110.

Country: UK, Spain, Germany.

Synopsis: Tells the story of a young man from Liverpool roused by the appeal of a Spanish militiaman to go and fight for the Republican cause in Spain in the Civil War of 1936. It follows his relationship with the POUM group that he joins, especially with Blanca, and the tragic political in-fighting that developed between the Communists and other left-wing groups of the Republican side.

Ian Hart (Dave Carne), Rosana Pastor (Blanca), Frederic Pierrot (Bernard), Tom Gilroy (Lawrence), Iciar Bollain (Maite), Marc Martinez (Vidal), Suzanne Maddock (Kim).

p: Sally Hibbin, Gerardo Herrero, Ulrich Felsberg, sc: Jim Allen, ph: Barry Ackroyd, ed: Jonathan Morris.

**Mediterraneo** (1991)

Director: Gabriele Salvatores.

Production Company: Ama Films, Penta Films.

Country: Italy.

Running Time: 100.

Synopsis: At the outbreak of the Second World War, eight Italian soldiers are posted to an island in the Aegean to defend it for the Fascists. Their battleship is destroyed and they find themselves effectively cut off from the war and from Italy. Gradually the soldiers find themselves becoming drawn in to the Greek way of life.

Diego Abatantuono, Claudio Bigagli, Giuseppe Cederna, Claudio Bisio.

p: Gianni Minervini, sc: Vincenzo Monteleone, ph: Italo Petriccione, ed: Nino Baragli.

**Name Of The Rose, The (1986)**

Director: Jean- Jacques Annaud

Production Company: Constantin Film, Cristaldi Film, Films Ariane, Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen.

Country: German Federal Republic, Italy, France.

Running Time: 131.

Synopsis: Set in an isolated monastery in 14th Century Northern Italy. A Franciscan monk, Brother William, and a young novice, Adso, arrive at the monastery for a meeting between conflicting parties and religious orders. However, just before their arrival the first of a series of mysterious deaths occur, and William sets about trying to solve the mystery, with the trail pointing to the monastery's labyrinth of a library, access to which is forbidden and guarded. Others at the monastery, however, believe the death to have been caused by devilry and the supernatural.

Sean Connery (William of Baskerville), Christian Slater (Adso of Melk), Helmut Qualtinger (Remigio de Varagine), Michel Lonsdale (Abbot), Feodor Chaliapin (Jorge de Burgos), Valentina Vargas (girl), Ron Perlman (Salvatore), F. Murray Abraham (Bernardo Gui).

p: Thomas Schuly and Jake Eberts, sc: Andrew Birkin and Alain Godard from an original story by Umberto Eco, ph: Tonino Delli Colli, ed: Jane Seitz, m: James Horner.

**Postino, Il (1994)**

Director: Michael Radford.

Production Company: Blue Dahlia Productions, Esterno Mediterraneo Film, Canal Plus, Tiger Cinematografica, Cecchi Gori.

Country: Italy, France.

Running Time: 116.

Synopsis: Melancholic tale of a simple Mediterranean islander whose life is changed by his friendship with an exiled Chilean poet.

Massimo Troisi (Mario), Philippe Noiret (Pablo Neruda), Maria Grazia Cucinotta (Beatrice), Linda Moretti (Rosa).

p: Alberto Passone, sc: Giacomo Scarpelli and Massimo Troisi, ed: Roberto Perpignani, m: Luis Enriquez Bacalov.

**Ridicule (1996)**

Director: Patrice Leconte.

Production Company: Epithete Production, Cinea, France 3 Cinema, Canal Plus, Investimage 4, Polygram Audio Visuel, Procirep, Gras Savoye, Centre National de la Cinematographie.

Country: France.

Running Time: 102.

Synopsis: Set in 1780 at the court of Louis XVI. Gregoire, an aristocratic but penniless engineer goes to Versailles to plead the case for draining the marshland on his estate which are a breeding ground for the diseases afflicting his peasants. As a country newcomer at court, he is derided by the unscrupulous "wits" but befriended by a physician who knows the ways of a court life, and by his daughter, Mathilde who is threatened with a loveless but wealthy marriage. Combining good character with a natural wit, Gregoire gradually negotiates his way through court intrigues to the sought-after audience with the King.

Fanny Ardant (Madame de Blayac), Charles Berling (Gregoire de Malavoy), Judith Godreche (Mathilde de Bellegarde), Jean Rochefort (Marquis de Bellegarde), Urbain Candelier (Louis XVI).

p: Gilles Legrand, sc: Remi Waterhouse, ph: Thierry Arbogast, ed: Joelle Hache, m: Antoine Duhamel.

**Three Colours White (1994).**

Director: Krzysztof Kieslowski.

Production Company: France 3 Cinema, CAB Productions, Zespol Filmowy Canal Plus.

Country: France, Switzerland, Poland.

Running Time: 92.

Synopsis: Black comedy, part two of the Three Colours trilogy. White refers to the French flag which symbolises equality. After his wife files for divorce because of his impotence, Polish born Karol returns to this homeland. But in Post Eastern bloc Poland, life is hard.

Zbigniew Zamachowski (Karol Karol), Julie Delpy (Dominique Vidal), Janusz Gajos (Mikolaj Jerzy Stuhr (Jurek).

p: Yvon Crenn, sc: Krzysztof Piesiewicz and Krzysztof Kieslowski, ph: Edward Latallo, ed: Ursula Lesiak, m: Zbigniew Paleta.

## Select Bibliography

This bibliography does not include all the newspaper and magazine articles which have been referenced as footnotes as and where appropriate. It includes everything else (books and essays) that has been footnoted in the chapters and a few authors not specifically referenced but who have been generally influential on my thinking.

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